

The Ancient and Medieval World

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*ADRIANNA BAKOS; BARRIE BRILL; NIALL CHRISTIE; JESSICA
HEMMING; ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ; AND TRACEY J. KINNEY*

KWANTLEN POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
SURREY, BC



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Welcome to *The Ancient & Medieval World*, a fully open and co-created educational resource designed to help students better understand a world long removed from their contemporary experience. We have organized this text in a modular format, with a general introduction to each topic, a timeline and relevant maps, several primary documents to help students to better understand the time period, and at least two visual or audio sources to add a different dimension to that understanding. Where possible, visuals have been uploaded in high resolution format so that the reader can zoom in on the image to view specific details. Each artefact has an accompanying set of discussion questions and each module contains a series of learning objectives. Unfamiliar terms have been linked to an explanatory glossary.

We hope that this collaboration will continue to grow as time passes, but the initial modules have been co-created by Dr Adrianna Bakos, University of the Fraser Valley, Mr Barrie A. Brill, Langara College (retired), Dr Niall Christie, Langara College, Dr Jessica Hemming, Corpus Christi College, Dr Aleksandar Jovanović, University of the Fraser Valley, and Dr Tracey J. Kinney, Kwantlen Polytechnic University. We have also benefited from the editorial assistance of our work-study student, John Niescier. The biographies and brief synopses that appear on the various timelines have been written by students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Many of the maps that appear in this work do so courtesy of Ian Mladjov. We thank him for his generosity in sharing this resource with our readers.

RELIGION: THE EARLY CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

Section Author: Tracey J. Kinney, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Learning Objectives

- Explain the factors that led some people to reject the polytheism of the late Roman Empire
- Identify several of the early Christian martyrs and their importance
- Evaluate the role of martyrdom in the rise of Christianity in the late Roman Empire
- Recognize the difficulties inherent in studying the early Christian martyrs
- Identify and explain the ways in which early Christian martyrdom has been reinterpreted over time



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/ancientandmedievalworld/?p=24#h5p-2>



Figure 1.1 Roman statue of Cybele from the 1st Century CE.

The later Roman Empire was a time of tremendous socioeconomic and political upheaval. Regional economies faltered as the empire ceased to expand, and rival contenders for the Imperial throne were raised and toppled with great frequency. It was around this time that many of Rome's peoples began to question the polytheism of the Roman state and seek solace in new religious and philosophical belief systems. **Stoic philosophy** drew upper class adherents, especially in the age of Marcus Aurelius, as did the 3rd-century **neoplatonist** view of a universe that proceeded from "The One" – a single, divine source. Romans of the lower classes, were often drawn to mystery cults, such as those of Cybele and Isis, that promised either salvation in an afterlife, or simply relief from the day-to-day miseries of this world. This, then, is the context within which we must situate the emergence of the first 'Christians'.

We should note too, that the belief system we now refer to as 'Christianity' developed out of first century Judaism and for many years, its teachings remained largely within the Judaic tradition. Where early adherents differed from their fellow Jews, however, was in their steadfast conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was their Messiah – the saviour promised in the holy

texts of Judaism. Following the death of Jesus at the hands of the Roman State, his followers believed that he was resurrected and raised to the kingdom of heaven, thereby bringing salvation to all of the faithful. According to

the Apostle Paul, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”¹ The early Christians preached equality, communal support for one another, and redemption after death – an appealing message in a time of great uncertainty.

Trade routes facilitated the spread of the Christian message, as did the efforts of evangelists, such as Paul/Saul of Tarsus. Historians continue to debate the extent to which early Christian beliefs made inroads within the Roman state, but the faith eventually came to the attention of the Roman authorities. Where most ‘foreign’ belief systems had simply been absorbed into the Roman pantheon, the Christians posed a particular challenge because of their absolute refusal to make sacrifices to the gods of Rome. Even so, the imperial reaction to the Christians varied substantially. Where some emperors (and even more local governors) launched brutal persecutions, others chose simply to ignore the Christians unless they posed a particular problem.

Christians themselves reacted inconsistently to the prosecutorial efforts of the state. Some renounced their faith and made the required sacrifices; others fled to avoid persecution, or accepted banishment rather than death. However, each of the individuals who are the focus of this chapter consciously chose death, rather than sacrifice to the gods of the Empire, if the accounts that remain are to be accepted. The ‘Narrative of the Martyrdom of Justin Martyr’ records the following exchange between Justin and his interrogator:

Justin answered, “No man of right judgment falleth from religion to irreligion.” Rusticus answered, “If ye will not obey me, ye shall be tortured without mercy.” Justin replied, “We ask in prayer, that we may be tortured for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and be saved; for this shall be our salvation and our confidence, at that more terrible tribunal whereat all the world must appear, of our King and Saviour.” In like manner said the other martyrs also. “Do what thou wilt, for we are Christians and do no sacrifice to idols.”

Then the Prefect Rusticus gave sentence, saying, “Let such as refuse to do sacrifice to the gods, and to obey the decree of the Emperor, be scourged, and then led away to capital punishment, in pursuance of the laws.” So the holy martyrs, giving glory to God, were led forth to the accustomed place, and were beheaded, giving full completion to their testimony by the confession of the Saviour.²

Here we see a pattern that will recur in other accounts of martyrdom: the accused defends their faith publicly, requests to be tortured, and finally, accepts their death, whatever form it may take. As you read the accounts that follow and study the images, consider the impact of these narratives and visuals on the audience.

Video: “[The Third Century Crises](#),” Ryan M. Reeves, Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Questions for Consideration

1. 1 Corinthians 15:22 “et sicut in Adam omnes moriuntur ita et in Christo omnes vivificabuntur”

2. John Henry Newman, et al., *Tracts for the Times* (London & Oxford: Rivington & Parker, 1834), 3–4.

1. In what ways were these accounts of martyrdom significant? Consider not only the expansion of Christian beliefs, but also their impact on the Roman State.

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Administrative Divisions of the Roman Empire c. 14 CE (map)

TRACEY J. KINNEY



Figure 1.2 The Roman Empire in 14 CE. Courtesy of Ian Mladjov. Click anywhere on the map to open a larger version.

By 14 CE, Rome's territorial extent included the entire Mediterranean Sea. This large territory was separated into various provinces in order to govern it more easily. The relationship between these provinces and the empire varied; some were ruled directly by the Roman emperor/state; some were managed by members of the Roman Senate; while some existed relatively autonomously, maintaining good relations with Rome as client states.

Questions for Consideration

1. How much of Rome's empire was actually controlled by the emperor?

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Justin Martyr and Antoninus Pius

TRACEY J. KINNEY

The Second Century

By the second century the number of Christians throughout the Roman Empire was growing and their refusal to worship both the gods of Rome and successive Roman Emperors, posed a considerable challenge. Though many emperors chose actively to seek out and persecute those who practised Christian rituals, the Emperor Antoninus Pius (r. 138-161) instead extended the policy of his predecessor and adoptive father, the Emperor Hadrian (r. 117-138). Christians were to be left alone, unless they committed an actual crime. Antoninus goes further to argue that those who bring false accusations should themselves be punished. It must be noted, however, that the authenticity of this epistle has been questioned, as has its origin. Eusebius, one of our key sources of information on Christianity in this era, first identifies Antoninus as the author, but later attributes it to his son, Marcus Aurelius. We do know that this epistle was preserved in *The Apology of Justin Martyr*, a work that was addressed directly to the Emperor and which defended the Christian faith against the most common accusations of the time. Justin Martyr (c. 100 – 165 CE) had studied a number of philosophical traditions – including those of the Stoics and Platonists – prior to his conversion to Christianity in the 130s. The date of his **apology** is disputed, with most accounts placing it somewhere between the years 139 and 150. This was a time of relative peace in the empire – indeed, the reign of Antoninus Pius, was one of the most peaceful recorded in the late Empire despite latent problems, readily identifiable in hindsight.

The Apology of Justin Martyr for the Christians to Antoninus Pius

1. To the Emperor Titus Ælius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Cæsar, and to his son Verissimus the Philosopher, and to Lucius the Philosopher, the son of (Ælius Verus) Cæsar by birth, and of Pius by adoption, the lover of learning; and to the sacred Senate, and to all the Roman people, in behalf of those of all nations who are unjustly hated and persecuted I Justin, the son of Priscus, and grandson of Bacchius, natives of Flavia Neapolis of Syria Palestine, being myself one of those (who are so unjustly used) offer this address and supplication.

2. Reason herself dictates that those, who can with **propriety** be **denominated** Pious and Philosophers, should love and honour truth alone, and refuse to follow the opinions of the ancients, if plainly **erroneous**. For right reason not only forbids us to **assent** to those who are unjust, either in practice or in principle, but commands the lover of truth by all means, to choose that which is just in word and deed, even in preference to his own life, and under the threatened danger of immediate death

3. ... [W]e **entreat** that the charges against Christians may be examined; and if they be proved to be well founded, we are willing that they should be punished as they deserve, or even to punish them ourselves. But if no one has any proof to bring against them, right reason requires that ye should not, in consequence of an evil report, injure innocent men, or rather yourselves, since your decisions would be influenced not by

judgment but by passion.... From a mere name [Christian] neither praise nor blame can justly arise ¹, unless something either good or bad can be proved by actions.

....

5. Ye judge not righteous judgment, but under the excitement of unreasonable passion, and lashed on by the scourges of evil demons, ye punish without judgment and without thought. For the truth must be spoken. Evil demons, in times of old, assuming various forms, went in unto the daughters of men, and committed other abominations; and so astonished the minds of men with the wonders which they displayed, that they formed not a rational judgment on what was done, but were hurried away by their fears²; so that, not knowing them to be evil demons, they styled them gods, and addressed them by the name which each demon imposed upon himself.

....

16. With respect to the charge of **impiety** [levelled against Christians]: what man of consideration will not confess that this accusation is falsely alleged against us? since we worship the Creator of this Universe, declaring, as we have been taught, that he requires not sacrifices of blood, and libations, and incense; and praise him to the utmost of our power, with words of prayer and thanksgiving, for all things which we enjoy. For we have learned, that the only honour which is worthy of him is, not to consume with fire what he hath given us for our nourishment, but to distribute them to ourselves and to those who have need: and that our thankfulness to him is best expressed, by the solemn offering of prayers and hymns. Moreover we pour forth our praises for our creation, and every provision for our well-being; for the various qualities of all creatures, and the changes of seasons; and (for the hope) of rising again in incorruption, through faith which is in him. Again we have learned, that he who taught us these things, and for this end was born, even Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea, in the time of Tiberius Cæsar, was the Son of him who is truly God, and we esteem him in the second place. And that we with reason honour the prophetic Spirit, in the third place, we shall hereafter show. For upon this point they accuse us of madness, saying that we give the second place after the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of all things, to a man who was crucified; (and this they do) being ignorant of the mystery which is in this matter; to which we **exhort** you to take heed while we explain it.

17. For we have forewarned you to beware lest those demons, whom we have before accused, should deceive you, and prevent you from reading and understanding what we say. For they strive to retain you as their slaves and servants, and sometimes by revelations in dreams, and at other times again by magical tricks, enslave those who strive not at all for their own salvation. In like manner as we also, since we have been obedient to the Word, abstain from such things, and, through the Son, follow the only **unbegotten** God. We, who once delighted in **fornication**, now embrace chastity only: we, who once used magical arts, have **consecrated** ourselves to the good and unbegotten God: we, who loved above all things the gain of money and possessions, now bring all that we have into one common stock, and give a part to every one that needs: we, who hated and killed one another, and permitted not those of another nation, on account of their different customs, to live with us under the same roof, now, since the appearing of Christ, live at the same table, and

1. Here, Justin is arguing that the persecution of Christians is not morally wrong but logically wrong. He uses rationality as the basis for his argument
2. Here, Justin is encouraging the emperor to make decisions not based on fear or emotions, but logic. He is portraying the persecution of Christians as an illogical action.

part for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those who unjustly hate us; that they also, living after the excellent institutions of Christ, may have good hope with us to obtain the same blessings, with God the Lord of all.

....

90. If now what we have advanced appears to be reasonable and true, honour it accordingly; and if it appears folly, despise it as foolish, but pass not sentence of death against those who have done no evil, as if they were enemies. For we have already forewarned you, that ye shall not escape the future judgment of God, if ye continue in unrighteousness. And we shall exclaim, What God wills, let that come to pass. Although we might demand of you, from the **epistle** of the most great and illustrious Cæsar Adrian³, your father, that which we require, that ye should command right judgment to be made, we have yet preferred that this should not take place because it was so ordained by Adrian⁴, but have made this address and explanation to you, knowing that we demand what is just....

The Epistle of the Emperor Antoninus Pius to the Common Assembly of Asia



Figure 1.3: Antoninus Pius.

The Emperor Cæsar, Titus Ælius Adrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius, Pontifex Maximus, fifteenth time Tribune, thrice Consul, Father of his Country, to the Common Assembly of Asia, sends greeting.

I am well assured, that the gods themselves will take heed that men of this kind shall not escape: for it is much more their interest to punish, if they can, those who refuse to worship them. Whereas ye trouble them, and accuse the opinions which they hold as if they were Atheists: and bring many other charges of which we are able to discover no proof. Nay, it would be in their **estimation** a great advantage to die for that of which they are accused: and they conquer you, by throwing away their own lives, rather than comply with what you require them to do.

With respect to earthquakes, which either have happened or do happen, it is not fitting that ye should regard them with **despondency**, whatever they may be, comparing your own conduct with theirs, and observing how much more confident they have towards God, than ye. Ye, in fact, at such periods, appear

3. Antoninus Pius' predecessor, the Emperor Hadrian

4. Hadrian

to forget the gods, and neglect your sacred rites. And ye know not the worship which belongs to God; whence ye envy those who do worship him, and persecute them even unto death. Respecting such men, certain other of the rulers of provinces wrote to my Father of blessed memory [Antoninus Pius was the adopted son of the Emperor Hadrian]; to whom also he wrote in reply, that they should in no wise trouble men of that kind, unless they were shown to be making any attempt against the dominion of the Romans. Many too have given information respecting such men to me also, to whom I answered, in conformity with my father's opinion. If then anyone shall bring any charge against one of these men, simply as such, let him who is so accused be released, even if he should be proved to be one of this kind of men: and let the accuser himself be subject to punishment.

Questions for Consideration

1. To what extent does the Apology of Justin Martyr challenge the authority of the Roman State?
2. Is the policy advocated by the Emperor Antoninus Pius an effective way to contain the growing challenge of Christianity within the Empire?
3. What are the key characteristics of the Christianity detailed by Justin Martyr?

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The Case of Polycarp

TRACEY J. KINNEY

The Problematic Martyrdom of Polycarp

The document that follows has been the subject of ongoing historical debate. Questions have been raised about the dating of the original document (with estimates ranging between 155 and 167 CE),¹ the accuracy of its contents, the nature of its composition, and its authorship. Some have gone so far as to argue that the text is wholly a work of fiction, designed simply to draw converts to the faith.² Nonetheless, “The Martyrdom of Polycarp” has been highly influential in shaping our understanding and image of early Christian martyrs. As to Polycarp himself, we have only fragmentary information. He is considered to be a crucial figure in early Christian history having been born at the end of the apostolic era. His writings emphasize the importance of the Apostle Paul/Saul and his interpretation of Christianity. As you read the document, consider the way that the author has chosen to tell the story of Polycarp’s martyrdom and the essential points that have been highlighted.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp

THE church of God which sojourns at Smyrna, to the church of God sojourning in Philomelium and to all the congregations of the holy and catholic church in every place: Mercy, peace, and love from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, be multiplied.

Chap. i.—Subject of which we write.

We have written to you, brethren, as to what relates to the martyrs, and especially to the blessed Polycarp, who put an end to the persecution, having, as it were, set a seal upon it by his martyrdom. For almost all the events that happened previously [to this one], took place that the Lord might show us from above a martyrdom becoming the gospel. For he waited to be delivered up, even as the Lord had done, that we also might become his followers, while we look not merely at what concerns ourselves, but have regard also to our neighbours. For it is the part of a true and well-founded love, not only to wish one’s self to be saved, but also all the brethren.

Chap. ii.—The wonderful constancy of the martyrs.

All the martyrdoms, then, were blessed and noble which took place according to the will of God. For it becomes us who profess greater piety than others, to ascribe the authority over all things to God. And truly, who can fail to admire their nobleness of mind, and their patience, with that love towards their Lord which

1. Sara Parvis, “The Martyrdom of Polycarp,” *The Expository Times* 188, no. 3 (December 2006): 106

2. See for example Hans von Campenhausen, *Aus der Frühzeit des Christentums, Studien zur Kirchengeschichte des ersten und zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1963), 253–301.

they displayed?—who, when they were so torn with scourges, that the frame of their bodies, even to the very inward veins and arteries, was laid open, still patiently endured, while even those that stood by pitied and **bewailed** them. But they reached such a pitch of **magnanimity**, that not one of them let a sigh or a groan escape them; thus proving to us all that those holy martyrs of Christ, at the very time when they suffered such torments, were absent from the body, or rather, that the Lord then stood by them, and communed with them. And, looking to the grace of Christ, they despised all the torments of this world, redeeming themselves from eternal punishment by [the suffering of] a single hour. For this reason the fire of their savage executioners appeared cool to them. ...

Chap. iii.—The constancy of Germanicus. The death of Polycarp is demanded.

For the devil did indeed invent many things against them; but thanks be to God, he could not prevail over all. For the most noble Germanicus strengthened the timidity of others by his own patience, and fought heroically with the wild beasts. For, when the proconsul sought to persuade him, and urged him to take pity upon his age, he attracted the wild beast towards himself, and provoked it, being desirous to escape all the more quickly from an unrighteous and **impious** world. But upon this the whole multitude, marvelling at the nobility of mind displayed by the devout and godly race of Christians, cried out, “Away with the atheists; let Polycarp be sought out!”

Chap. iv.—Quintus the apostate.

Now one named Quintus, a Phrygian, who was but lately come from **Phrygia**, when he saw the wild beasts, became afraid. This was the man who forced himself and some others to come forward voluntarily [for trial]. Him the proconsul, after many **entreaties**, persuaded to swear and to offer sacrifice. Wherefore, brethren, we do not commend those who give themselves up [to suffering], seeing the gospel does not teach so to do.

Chap. v.—The departure and vision of Polycarp.

But the most admirable Polycarp, when he first heard [that he was sought for], was in no measure disturbed, but resolved to continue in the city. However, in deference to the wish of many, he was persuaded to leave it. He departed, therefore, to a country house not far distant from the city. There he stayed with a few [friends], engaged in nothing else night and day than praying for all men, and for the churches throughout the world, according to his usual custom. And while he was praying, a vision presented itself to him three days before he was taken; and, behold, the pillow under his head seemed to him on fire. Upon this, turning to those that were with him, he said to them prophetically, “I must be burnt alive.”

Chap. vi.—Polycarp is betrayed by a servant.

And when those who sought for him were at hand, he departed to another dwelling, whither his pursuers immediately came after him. And when they found him not, they seized upon two youths [that were there], one of whom, being subjected to torture, confessed. It was thus impossible that he should continue hid, since those that betrayed him were of his own household. ...

Chap. vii.—Polycarp is found by his pursuers.

His pursuers then, along with horsemen, and taking the youth with them, went forth at supper-time on the day of the preparation, with their usual weapons, as if going out against a robber. And being come about evening [to the place where he was], they found him lying down in the upper room of a certain little house, from which he might have escaped into another place; but he refused, saying, “The will of God be done.” So when he heard that they were come, he went down and **spake** with them. And as those that were present marvelled at his age and constancy, some of them said, “Was so much effort made to capture such a venerable

man?” Immediately then, in that very hour, he ordered that something to eat and drink should be set before them, as much indeed as they cared for, while he besought them to allow him an hour to pray without disturbance. And on their giving him leave, he stood and prayed, being full of the grace of God, so that he could not cease for two full hours, to the astonishment of them that heard him, insomuch that many began to repent that they had come forth against so godly and **venerable** an old man.

Chap. viii.—Polycarp is brought into the city.

Now, as soon as he had ceased praying, having made mention of all that had at any time come in contact with him, both small and great, illustrious and obscure, as well as the whole catholic church throughout the world, the time of his departure having arrived, they set him upon an ass, and conducted him into the city, the day being that of the great Sabbath. And the Irenarch Herod, accompanied by his father Nicetes (both riding in a chariot), met him, and taking him up into the chariot, they seated themselves beside him, and endeavoured to persuade him, saying, “What harm is there in saying, Lord Cæsar, and in sacrificing, with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, and so make sure of safety?” But he at first gave them no answer; and when they continued to urge him, he said, “I shall not do as you advise me.” So they, having no hope of persuading him, began to speak bitter words unto him, and cast him with violence out of the chariot, insomuch that, in getting down from the carriage, he dislocated his leg [by the fall]. But without being disturbed, and as if suffering nothing, he went eagerly forward with all haste, and was conducted to the stadium, where the **tumult** was so great, that there was no possibility of being heard.

Chap. ix.—Polycarp refuses to revile Christ.

Now, as Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven, saying, “Be strong, and show thyself a man, O Polycarp!” No one saw who it was that spoke to him; but those of our brethren who were present heard the voice. And as he was brought forward, the tumult became great when they heard that Polycarp was taken. And when he came near, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, [the proconsul] sought to persuade him to deny [Christ], saying, “Have respect to thy old age,” and other similar things, according to their custom, [such as], “Swear by the fortune of Cæsar; repent, and say. Away with the Atheists.” But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, “Away with the Atheists.” Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, “Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ;” Polycarp declared, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?”

Chap. x.—Polycarp confesses himself a Christian.

And when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, “Swear by the fortune of Cæsar,” he answered, “Since thou art vainly urgent that, as thou sayest, I should swear by the fortune of Cæsar, and pretendest not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and thou shalt hear them.” The proconsul replied, “Persuade the people.” But Polycarp said, “To thee I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]; for we are taught to give all due honour (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities which are **ordained** of God. But as for these, I do not deem them worthy of receiving any account from me.”

Chap. xi.—No threats have any effect on Polycarp.

The proconsul then said to him, “I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent.” But he answered, “Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous.” But again the

proconsul said to him, "I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent." But Polycarp said, "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt."

Chap. xii.—Polycarp is sentenced to be burned.

While he spoke these and many other like things, he was filled with confidence and joy, and his **countenance** was full of grace, so that not merely did it not fall as if troubled by the things said to him, but, on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his herald to proclaim in the midst of the stadium thrice, "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." This proclamation having been made by the herald, the whole multitude both of the heathen and Jews, who dwelt at **Smyrna**, cried out with uncontrollable fury, and in a loud voice, "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods." Speaking thus, they cried out, and besought Philip the Asiarch to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. But Philip answered that it was not lawful for him to do so, seeing the shows of wild beasts were already finished. Then it seemed good to them to cry out with one consent, that Polycarp should be burnt alive. For thus it behoved the vision which was revealed to him in regard to his pillow to be fulfilled, when, seeing it on fire as he was praying, he turned about and said prophetically to the faithful that were with him, "I must be burnt alive."

Chap. xiii.—The funeral pile is erected.

This, then, was carried into effect with greater speed than it was spoken, the multitudes immediately gathering together wood and **fagots** out of the shops and baths; the Jews especially, according to custom, eagerly assisting them in it. And when the funeral pile was ready, Polycarp, laying aside all his garments, and loosing his girdle, sought also to take off his sandals,—a thing he was not accustomed to do, inasmuch as every one of the faithful was always eager who should first touch his skin. For, on account of his holy life, he was, even before his martyrdom, adorned with every kind of good. Immediately then they surrounded him with those substances which had been prepared for the funeral pile. But when they were about also to fix him with nails, he said, "Leave me as I am; for he that giveth me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile."

Chap. xiv.—The prayer of Polycarp.

They did not nail him then, but simply bound him. And he, placing his hands behind him, and being bound like a distinguished ram [taken] out of a great flock for sacrifice, and prepared to be an acceptable burnt-offering unto God, looked up to heaven, and said, "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before thee, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast counted me worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Thy martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost. Among whom may I be accepted this day before Thee as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou, the ever-truthful God, hast fore-ordained, hast revealed beforehand to me, and now hast fulfilled. Wherefore also I praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom, to Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen."

Chap. xv.—Polycarp is not injured by the fire.

When he had pronounced this amen, and so finished his prayer, those who were appointed for the purpose

kindled the fire. And as the flame blazed forth in great fury, we, to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle, and have been preserved that we might report to others what then took place. For the fire, shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr. And he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odour [coming from the pile], as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been smoking there.

Chap. xvi.—Polycarp is pierced by a dagger.

At length, when those wicked men perceived that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to go near and pierce him through with a dagger. And on his doing this, there came forth a dove, and a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished; and all the people wondered that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect, of whom this most admirable Polycarp was one, having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the catholic church which is in Smyrna. For every word that went out of his mouth either has been or shall yet be accomplished.

Chap. XVII.—The Christians are refused Polycarp's body.

But when the adversary of the race of the righteous, the envious, malicious, and wicked one, perceived the impressive nature of his martyrdom, and [considered] the blameless life he had led from the beginning, and how he was now crowned with the wreath of immortality, having beyond dispute received his reward, he did his utmost that not the least memorial of him should be taken away by us, although many desired to do this, and to become possessors of his holy flesh. For this end he suggested it to Nicetes, the father of Herod and brother of Alce, to go and **entreat** the governor not to give up his body to be buried, "lest," said he, "forsaking Him that was crucified, they begin to worship this one." This he said at the suggestion and urgent persuasion of the Jews, who also watched us, as we sought to take him out of the fire, being ignorant of this, that it is neither possible for us ever to forsake Christ, who suffered for the salvation of such as shall be saved throughout the whole world (the blameless one for sinners), nor to worship any other. For Him indeed, as being the Son of God, we adore; but the martyrs, as disciples and followers of the Lord, we worthily love on account of their extraordinary affection towards their own King and Master, of whom may we also be made companions and fellow-disciples!

Chap. xviii.—The body of Polycarp is burned.

The centurion then, seeing the strife excited by the Jews, placed the body in the midst of the fire, and consumed it. Accordingly, we afterwards took up his bones, as being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold, and deposited them in a fitting place, whither, being gathered together, as opportunity is allowed us, with joy and rejoicing, the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already finished their course, and for the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps.

Chap. xix.—Praise of the martyr Polycarp.

This, then, is the account of the blessed Polycarp, who, being the twelfth that was martyred in Smyrna (reckoning those also of Philadelphia), yet occupies a place of his own in the memory of all men, insomuch that he is everywhere spoken of by the heathen themselves. He was not merely an illustrious teacher, but also a pre-eminent martyr, whose martyrdom all desire to imitate, as having been altogether consistent with the gospel of Christ. For, having through patience overcome the unjust governor, and thus acquired the crown of immortality, he now, with the apostles and all the righteous [in heaven], rejoicingly glorifies God, even

the Father, and blesses our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our souls, the Governor of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the catholic church throughout the world.

Chap. xx.—This epistle is to be transmitted to the brethren.

Since, then, ye requested that we would at large make you acquainted with what really took place, we have for the present sent you this summary account through our brother Marcus. When, therefore, ye have yourselves read this epistle, be pleased to send it to the brethren at a greater distance, that they also may glorify the Lord, who makes such choice of His own servants. To Him who is able to bring us all by His grace and goodness into His everlasting kingdom, through His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, to Him be glory, and honour, and power, and majesty, for ever. Amen. Salute all the saints. They that are with us salute you, and Evarestus, who wrote this epistle, with all his house.

Chap. xxi.—The date of the martyrdom.

Now, the blessed Polycarp suffered martyrdom on the second day of the month Xanthicus just begun, the seventh day before the Calends of May, on the great Sabbath, at the eighth hour. He was taken by Herod, Philip the Trallian being high priest, Statins Quadratus being proconsul, but Jesus Christ being King for ever, to whom be glory, honour, majesty, and an everlasting throne, from generation to generation. Amen.

Chap. xxii.—Salutation.

We wish you, brethren, all happiness, while you walk according to the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ; with whom be glory to God the Father and the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of His holy elect, after whose example the blessed Polycarp suffered, following in whose steps may we too be found in the kingdom of Jesus Christ!

These things Caius transcribed from the copy of Irenæus (who was a disciple of Polycarp), having himself been intimate with Irenæus. And I Socrates transcribed them at Corinth from the copy of Caius. Grace be with you all.

And I again, Pionius, wrote them from the previously written copy, having carefully searched into them, and the blessed Polycarp having manifested them to me through a revelation, even as I shall show in what follows. I have collected these things, when they had almost faded away through the lapse of time, that the Lord Jesus Christ may also gather me along with His elect into His heavenly kingdom, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Questions for Consideration

1. “The Martyrdom of Polycarp” is often considered to be the prototypical account of Christian martyrdom. What are the essential characteristics of martyrdom, as recorded here?

2. How similar is the account of Perpetua's martyrdom to that of Polycarp?
3. Why is the dating of the document (between 155 and 167 CE) so important?

Featured Individual: Vibia Perpetua

TRACEY J. KINNEY

A Woman's Account of Martyrdom

Around 203 CE, in the Roman city of Carthage, a woman named Vibia Perpetua was put to death in the arena. The survival of a diary which she kept while imprisoned has meant that the story of the martyrdom of Perpetua, and the Christians imprisoned alongside of her, is one of the most widely known in the contemporary world. Despite the male narrator's voice at the beginning and the end of the diary, the account itself remains one of the oldest Christian texts authored by a woman. The narrator refers to a renewed persecution of Christians launched by the Emperor Severus (r. 193-211); however, contemporary historians have argued that this period did not coincide with a renewed imperial persecution and, rather, the persecutions that led to the deaths of Perpetua, Felicitas, and the others, were a result of the actions of local governors concerned with challenges to their authority.

The Martyrdom of Vibia Perpetua

A. D. 203.

A VIOLENT persecution being set on foot by the emperor Severus, in 202, it reached Africa the following year; when, by order of Minutius Timinianus, (or Firminianus,) five **catechumens** were apprehended at Carthage for the faith: namely, Revocatus and his fellow-slave Felicitas, Saturninus, and Secundulus, and Viba [sic] Perpetua. Felicitas was seven months gone with child; and Perpetua had an infant at her breast, was of a good family, twenty-two years of age, and married to a person of quality in the city. She had a father, a mother, and two brothers; the third, Dinocrates, died about seven years old. These five martyrs were joined by Saturus, probably brother to Saturninus, and who seems to have been their instructor: he underwent a voluntary imprisonment, because he would not abandon them. The martyrs were for some days before their commitment kept under a strong guard in a private house: and the account Perpetua gives of their sufferings to the eve of their death, is as follows:

"We were in the hands of our persecutors, when my father, out of the affection he bore me, made new efforts to shake my resolution. I said to him: 'Can that vessel, which you see, change its name?' He said: 'No.' I replied: 'Nor can I call myself any other than I am, that is to say, a Christian.' At that word my father in a rage fell upon me, as if he would have pulled my eyes out, and beat me: but went away in confusion, seeing me invincible: after this we enjoyed a little **repose**, and in that interval received baptism. The Holy Ghost, on our coming out of the water, inspired me to pray for nothing but patience under **corporal pains**. A few days after this we were put into prison: I was shocked at the horror and darkness of the place; for till then I knew not what such sort of places were.



Figure 1.4: Mosaic of Perpetua in the Euphrasian Basilica, Poreč, Croatia.

We suffered much that day, chiefly on account of the great heat caused by the crowd, and the ill-treatment we met with from the soldiers. I was moreover tortured with concern, for that I had not my infant. But the deacons, Tertius and Pomponius, who assisted us, obtained, by money, that we might pass some hours in a more **commodious** part of the prison to refresh ourselves. My infant being brought to me almost famished, I gave it the breast. I recommended him afterwards carefully to my mother, and encouraged my brother; but was much afflicted to see their concern for me. After a few days my sorrow was changed into comfort, and my prison itself seemed agreeable. One day my brother said to me: 'Sister, I am persuaded that you are a peculiar favourite of Heaven: pray to God to reveal to you whether this imprisonment will end in martyrdom or not, and acquaint me of it.' I, knowing God gave me daily tokens of his goodness, answered, full of confidence, 'I will inform you to-morrow.' I therefore asked that favour of God, and had this vision. I saw a golden ladder which reached from earth to the heavens; but so

narrow, that only one could mount it at a time. To the two sides were fastened all sorts of iron instruments, as swords, lances, hooks, and knives; so that if any one went up carelessly he was in great danger of having his flesh torn by those weapons. At the foot of the ladder lay a dragon of an enormous size, who kept guard to turn back and terrify those that endeavoured to mount it. The first that went up was Saturus, who was not apprehended with us, but voluntarily surrendered himself afterwards on our account: when he was got to the top of the ladder, he turned towards me and said: 'Perpetua, I wait for you; but take care lest the dragon bite you.' I answered: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, he shall not hurt me.' Then the dragon, as if afraid of me, gently lifted his head from under the ladder, and I, having got upon the first step, set my foot upon his head. Thus I mounted to the top, and there I saw a garden of an immense space, and in the middle of it a tall man sitting down dressed like a shepherd, having white hair. He was milking his sheep, surrounded with many thousands of persons clad in white. He called me by my name, bid me welcome, and gave me some curds made of the milk which he had drawn: I put my hands together and took and ate them; and all that were present said aloud, Amen. The noise awaked me, chewing something very sweet. As soon as I had related to my brother this vision, we both concluded that we should suffer death.

"After some days, a rumour being spread that we were to be examined, my father came from the city to the prison overwhelmed with grief: 'Daughter,' said he, 'have pity on my gray hairs, have compassion on your father, if I yet deserve to be called your father; if I myself have brought you up to this age: if you consider that my extreme love of you, made me always prefer you to all your brothers, make me not a reproach to mankind. Have respect for your mother and your aunt; have compassion on your child that cannot survive you; lay aside this resolution, this **obstinacy**, lest you ruin us all: for not one of us will dare open his lips any more if any misfortune befall you.' He took me by the hands at the same time and kissed them; he threw himself at my feet in tears, and called me no longer daughter, but, my lady. I confess, I was pierced with sharp sorrow when I considered that my father was the only person of our family that would not rejoice at my martyrdom. I **endeavoured** to comfort him, saying: 'Father, grieve not; nothing will happen but what pleases God; for we are not at our own disposal.' He then departed very much concerned. The next day, while we were at

dinner, a person came all on a sudden to summon us to examination. The report of this was soon spread, and brought together a vast crowd of people into the audience-chamber. We were placed on a sort of scaffold before the judge, who was Hilarian, procurator of the province, the proconsul being lately dead. All who were interrogated before me confessed boldly Jesus Christ. When it came to my turn, my father instantly appeared with my infant. He drew me a little aside, conjuring me in the most tender manner not to be insensible to the misery I should bring on that innocent creature to which I had given life. The president Hilarian joined with my father and said: 'What! will neither the gray hairs of a father you are going to make miserable, nor the tender innocence of a child, which your death will leave an orphan, move you? Sacrifice for the prosperity of the emperor.' I replied, 'I will not do it.' 'Are you then a Christian?' said Hilarian. I answered: 'Yes, I am.' As my father attempted to draw me from the scaffold, Hilarian commanded him to be beaten off, and he had a blow given him with a stick, which I felt as much as if I had been struck myself, so much was I grieved to see my father thus treated in his old age. Then the judge pronounced our sentence, by which we were all condemned to be exposed to wild beasts. We then joyfully returned to our prison; and as my infant had been used to the breast, I immediately sent Pomponius, the deacon, to demand him of my father, who refused to send him. And God so ordered it that the child no longer required to suck, nor did my milk **incommode** me."

Secundulus, being no more mentioned, seems to have died in prison before this interrogatory. Before Hilarian pronounced sentence, he had caused Saturus, Saturninus, and Revocatus, to be scourged; and Perpetua and Felicitas to be beaten on the face. They were reserved for the shows which were to be exhibited for the soldiers in the camp, on the festival of Geta, who had been made Cæsar four years before by his father Severus, when his brother Caracalla was created Augustus.

St. Perpetua relates another vision with which she was favoured, as follows:

"A few days after receiving sentence, when we were all together in prayer, I happened to name Dinocrates, at which I was astonished, because I had not before had him in my thoughts; and I that moment knew that I ought to pray for him. This I began to do with great fervour and sighing before God; and the same night I had the following vision: I saw Dinocrates coming out of a dark place, where there were many others, exceeding hot and thirsty; his face was dirty, his complexion pale, with the ulcer in his face of which he died at seven years of age, and it was for him that I had prayed. There seemed a great distance between him and me, so that it was impossible for us to come to each other. Near him stood a vessel full of water, whose brim was higher than the statue of an infant: he at tempted to drink, but though he had water he could not reach it. This mightily grieved me, and I awoke. By this I knew my brother was in pain, but I trusted I could by prayer relieve him: so I began to pray for him, **beseeking** God with tears, day and night, that he would grant me my request; as I continued to do till we were removed to the damp prison: being destined for a public show on the festival of Cæsar Geta. The day we were in the stocks I had this vision: I saw the place, which I had beheld dark before, now **luminous**; and Dinocrates, with his body very clean and well clad, refreshing himself, and instead of his wound a scar only. I awoke, and I knew he was relieved from his pain.

"Some days after, Pudens, the officer who commanded the guards of the prison, seeing that God favoured us with many gifts, had a great esteem of us, and admitted many people to visit us for our mutual comfort. On the day of the public shows my father came to find me out, overwhelmed with sorrow. He tore his beard, he threw himself **prostrate** on the ground, cursed his years, and said enough to move any creature; and I was ready to die with sorrow to see my father in so deplorable a condition. On the eve of the shows I was favoured with the following vision. The deacon Pomponius methought, knocked very hard at the prison-door, which I opened to him. He was clothed with a white robe, **embroidered** with innumerable pomegranates of gold. He said to me: 'Perpetua, we wait for you, come along.' He then took me by the hand and, led me

through very rough places into the middle of the **amphitheatre**, and said: 'Fear not.' And, leaving me, said again: 'I will be with you in a moment, and bear a part with you in your pains.' I was wondering the beasts were not let out against us, when there appeared a very ill-favoured Egyptian, who came to encounter me with others. But another beautiful troop of young men declared for me, and anointed me with oil for the combat. Then appeared a man of **prodigious** stature, in rich apparel, having a wand in his hand like the masters of the gladiators, and a green **bough** on which hung golden apples. Having ordered silence, he said that the bough should be my prize, if I vanquished the Egyptian—but that if he conquered me, he should kill me with a sword. After a long and **obstinate** engagement, I threw him on his face, and trod upon his head. The people applauded my victory with loud acclamations. I then approached the master of the amphitheatre, who gave me the bough with a kiss, and said: 'Peace be with you, my daughter.' After this I awoke, and found that I was not so much to combat with wild beasts as with the devils."

Here ends the relation of St. Perpetua.... The rest of the acts were added by an eye-witness. God had called to himself Secundulus in prison. Felicitas was eight months gone with child, and as the day of the shows approached, she was inconsolable lest she should not be brought to bed before it came; fearing that her martyrdom would be deferred on that account, because women with child were not allowed to be executed before they were delivered: the rest also were sensibly afflicted on their part to leave her alone in the road to their common hope. Wherefore they unanimously joined in prayer to obtain of God that she might be delivered against the shows. Scarce had they finished their prayer, when Felicitas found herself in labour. She cried out under the violence of her pain: one of the guards asked her, if she could not bear the throes of childbirth without crying out, what she would do when exposed to the wild beasts. She answered: "It is I that suffer what I now suffer; but then there will be another in me that will suffer for me, because I shall suffer for him." She was then delivered of a daughter, which a certain Christian woman took care of, and brought up as her own child. The tribune, who had the holy martyrs in custody, being informed by some persons of little credit, that the Christians would free themselves out of prison by some magic enchantments, used them the more cruelly on that account, and forbade any to see them. Thereupon Perpetua said to him: "Why do you not afford us some relief, since we are condemned by Cæsar, and destined to combat at his festival? Will it not be to your honour that we appear well fed?" At this the tribune trembled and blushed, and ordered them to be used with more humanity, and their friends to be admitted to see them. Pudens, the keeper of the prison, being already converted, secretly did them all the good offices in his power.

*The day before they suffered they gave them, according to custom, their last meal, which was called a free supper, and they ate in public. But the martyrs did their utmost to change it into an Agape, or Love-feast. Their chamber was full of people, whom they talked to with their usual resolution, threatening them with the judgments of God, and extolling the happiness of their own sufferings. Saturus, smiling at the curiosity of those that came to see them, said to them, "Will not to-morrow suffice to satisfy your inhuman curiosity in our regard? However you may seem now to pity us, to-morrow you will clap your hands at our death, and applaud our murderers. But observe well our faces, that you may know them again at that terrible day when all men shall be judged." They spoke with such courage and **intrepidity**, as astonished the infidels, and occasioned the conversion of several among them.*

*The day of their triumph being come, they went out of the prison to go to the **amphitheatre**. Joy sparkled in their eyes, and appeared in all their gestures and words. Perpetua walked with a composed countenance and easy pace, as a woman cherished by Jesus Christ, with her eyes modestly cast down: Felicitas went with her, following the men, not able to contain her joy. When they came to the gate of the amphitheatre the guards would have given them, according to custom, the superstitious habits with which they adorned such as appeared at*

these sights. For the men, a red mantle, which was the habit of the priests of Saturn: for the women, a little fillet round the head, by which the priestesses of Ceres were known. The martyrs rejected those idolatrous ceremonies; and, by the mouth of Perpetua, said, they came thither of their own accord on the promise made them that they should not be forced to any thing contrary to their religion. The tribune then consented that they might appear in the amphitheatre habited as they were. Perpetua sung, as being already victorious; Revocatus, Saturninus, and Satorus threatened the people that beheld them with the judgments of God: and as they passed over against the balcony of Hilarian, they said to him: "You judge us in this world, but God will judge you to the next."

The people, enraged at their boldness, begged they might be scourged, which was granted. They accordingly passed before the Venatores, or hunters, each of whom gave them a **lash**. They rejoiced exceedingly in being thought worthy to resemble our Saviour in his sufferings. God granted to each of them the death they desired; for when they were discoursing together about what kind of martyrdom would be agreeable to each, Saturninus declared that he would choose to be exposed to beasts of several sorts in order to the aggravation of his sufferings. Accordingly he and Revocatus, after having been attacked by a leopard, were also assaulted by a bear. Satorus dreaded nothing so much as a bear, and therefore hoped a leopard would dispatch him at once with his teeth. He was then exposed to a wild boar, but the beast turned upon his keeper, who received such a wound from him that he died in a few days after, and Satorus was only dragged along by him. Then they tied the martyr to the bridge near a bear, but that beast came not out of his lodge, so that Satorus, being sound and not hurt, was called upon for a second encounter. This gave him an opportunity of speaking to Pudens, the jailer that had been converted. The martyr encouraged him to **constancy** in the faith, and said to him: "You see I have not yet been hurt by any beast, as I desired and foretold; believe then steadfastly in Christ; I am going where you will see a leopard with one bite take away my life." It happened so, for a leopard being let out upon him, covered him all over with blood, whereupon the people jeering, cried out, "He is well baptized." The martyr said to Pudens, "Go, remember my faith, and let our sufferings rather strengthen than trouble you. Give me the ring you have on your finger." Satorus, having dipped it in his wound, gave it him back to keep as a pledge to animate him to a constancy in his faith, and fell down dead soon after. Thus he went first to glory to wait for Perpetua, according to her vision. Some with Mabillon, think this Pudens is the martyr honoured in Africa, on the 29th of April.

In the mean time, Perpetua and Felicitas had been exposed to a wild cow; Perpetua was first attacked, and the cow having tossed her up, she fell on her back. Then putting herself in a sitting posture, and perceiving her clothes were torn, she gathered them about her in the best manner she could, to cover herself, thinking more of decency than her sufferings. Getting up, not to seem **disconsolate**, she tied up her hair, which was fallen loose, and perceiving Felicitas on the ground much hurt by a toss of the cow, she helped her to rise. They stood together, expecting another assault from the beasts, but the people crying out that it was enough, they were led to the gate Saneivaria, where those that were not killed by the beasts were dispatched at the end of the shows by the confectores. Perpetua was here received by Rusticus, a **catechumen**, who attended her. This admirable woman seemed just returning to herself out of a long ecstasy, and asked when she was to fight the wild cow. Being told what had passed, she could not believe it till she saw on her body and clothes the marks of what she had suffered, and knew the catechumen. With regard to this circumstance of her acts, St. Austin cries out, "Where was she when assaulted and torn by so furious a wild beast, without feeling her wounds, and when, after that furious combat, she asked when it would begin? What did she, not to see what all the world saw? What did she enjoy who did not feel such pain. By what love, by what vision, by what potion was she so transported out of herself, and as it were divinely **inebriated**, to seem without feeling in a mortal body?" She called for her brother, and said to him and Rusticus, "Continue firm in the faith, love one another, and be not **scandalized** at our sufferings." All the martyrs were now brought to the place of their butchery. But the people, not yet satisfied

with beholding blood, cried out to have them brought into the middle of the amphitheatre, that they might have the pleasure of seeing them receive the last blow. Upon this, some of the martyrs rose up, and having given one another the kiss of peace, went of their own accord into the middle of the arena; others were dispatched without speaking, or stirring out of the place they were in. St. Perpetua fell into the hands of a very **timorous** and unskilful apprentice of the gladiators, who, with a trembling hand, gave her many slight wounds, which made her languish a long time. Thus, says St. Austin, did two women, amidst fierce beasts and the swords of gladiators, vanquish the devil and all his fury. The day of their martyrdom was the 7th of March, as it is marked in the most ancient martyrologies, and in the Roman calendar as old as the year 354, published by Bucherius. St. Prosper says they suffered at Carthage, which agrees with all the circumstances. Their bodies were in the great church of Carthage, in the fifth age, as St. Victor informs us. Saint Austin says, their festival drew yearly more to honour their memory in their church, than curiosity had done to their martyrdom. They are mentioned in the canon of the Mass.

Questions for Consideration

1. In what ways does the narrator's account change or influence your reading of Perpetua's own diary?
2. In what ways would accounts such as these (Perpetua's diary and the narrator's additions) draw people to Christianity? How might these accounts be seen as a direct challenge to Roman authority?
3. What do these accounts reveal about gender norms and social relations in the late Roman Empire?

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A Renaissance Conception of Martyrdom

TRACEY J. KINNEY

Caravaggio and Matthew

The historical record on Matthew the Evangelist (also, Matthew the Apostle; also, Levi) is virtually non-existent. All that can be confirmed is that he was likely a tax-collector at a customs house near the Sea of Galilee. Given his occupation, it is assumed that he would have been greatly disliked by those with whom he had contact. Christian tradition tells that Levi/Matthew became a disciple of Jesus, accompanied him during his ministry, and was a witness to the resurrection. Levi/Matthew evidently spent the remainder of his life preaching the gospel until his death by execution in the year 74. However, both the nature and place of his death are contested, with some historians arguing that he was not, in fact, executed. There is also considerable dispute as to whether Levi/Matthew was actually the author of the Gospel of Matthew, or if in fact this was simply attributed to him by the Church fathers many years after his death. None of these debates are evident in Caravaggio's "The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew", completed between 1599 and 1600.

The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew



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<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/ancientandmedievalworld/?p=32#h5p-4>

Figure 1.5 The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew by Caravaggio c.1599-1600. Click on the + for analytical prompts

Oil on canvas, 3.23m x 3.43m, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.

Questions for Consideration

1. What do we learn of Matthew/Levi's death in Caravaggio's painting?
2. Why do you think that Caravaggio chose to depict the events in this way?
3. What does this depiction tell us about the time in which Caravaggio lived?
4. Does this painting align with or challenge the themes discussed earlier in this chapter regarding martyrdom in the early Christian faith?

Two Views of the Martyrdom of Eulàlia of Mérida

TRACEY J. KINNEY

Eulàlia of Mérida

As with many of the early Christian martyrs very little of Eulàlia's life story can be confirmed; there is even debate as to whether Eulàlia of Mérida and Eulàlia of Barcelona are the same person. Most sources accept that she was martyred during the Great Persecution launched by Diocletian and Maximian as they consolidated their hold on the Imperial thrones of the Eastern and Western Roman Empire. 304 seems the most likely date of her martyrdom. The Christian poet Prudentius (348–405) tells that Eulàlia (often Saint Eulàlia of Mérida) was martyred at the age of 12 or 13 for refusing to acknowledge the Roman gods and openly denying the authority of the Western Emperor Maximian. In Prudentius' account, Eulàlia was sentenced to death by the Roman court, her flesh torn from her sides, after which she was set on fire. Eventually the smoke and flames are said to have suffocated her. Prudentius also wrote that a dove flew from her body at the moment of Eulàlia's death.

Eulàlia's martyrdom has been chronicled by many artists over the years. The images that follow were created well over a millennia after the subject's death. The first, by Bernat Martorell, dates to approximately 1442–1445; the second, by John William Waterhouse, to 1885. Martorell (d. 1452) was a Catalan artist who painted a great many altarpieces and illuminated manuscripts; his work is often characterized as late Gothic in style. Waterhouse, usually considered among the Victorian Romantic painters, drew inspiration from both classical and literary themes. "The Martyrdom of Saint Eulalia" is widely regarded as one of his most successful works; at the time of its exhibition, however, the portrayal of Eulàlia created considerable controversy.



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Figure 1.6 Martyrdom of Saint Eulalia by Bernat Martorell ~1442–1445. Altarpiece: Tempera & gold leaf on wood, 1.32m x .93m, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Click on the + for analytical prompts



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Figure 1.7 Saint Eulalia by John William Waterhouse c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 1.89m x 1.18m, Tate Britain, London. Click on the + for analytical prompts

Questions for Consideration

1. How do these two images differ in their presentation of Eulàlia's martyrdom?
2. What does each image tell us about the time period in which the painting was created?
3. Are there similar themes in the two images of martyrdom?
4. To what extent do these images of martyrdom confirm or call into question the themes discussed earlier in this module regarding the role and importance of martyrdom during the late Roman period?

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TRACEY J. KINNEY

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RELIGION: THE RISE OF ISLAM

Section Author: Niall Christie, Langara College

Learning Objectives

- Explain how the Muslim community came into existence
- Identify key individuals in early Islamic history
- Explain important Muslim beliefs and practices
- Examine the origins of major historic and current divisions in the Muslim religion



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In this module we will examine the origins of **Islam** from its beginnings in Arabia in the early 7th century to the end of the first **fitna** in 661. We will begin by examining the life and career of the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632), then consider some basic Muslim beliefs and practices. After that we will look briefly at the leaders of the Muslim community who came after the Prophet, known as the **rashidun**, which will allow us to examine both the early Muslim expansion and the origins of the Sunni-Shi'ite split in Islam that continues to loom large in modern-day news reports and intra-Muslim relations in both the West and the Muslim world.

Muhammad and the Origins of Islam

NIAL CHRISTIE



Figure 2.1 Map of Arabia, 600 AD.

According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Muhammad was born in about 570 in the Arabian city of Mecca. At the time Mecca was an important trade and **pagan** pilgrimage centre, and like much of Arabia its society was arranged along tribal lines. Muhammad's start in this environment was not auspicious, for his father had died before he was born, and his mother also died when he was very young. However, he was able to make his way in society, following his father's trade as a merchant and establishing a reputation for trustworthiness. He attracted the attention of a wealthy widow named Khadija, becoming her business manager, and then her husband. The two loved each other deeply, and while she was alive Muhammad took no other wives, something that was unusual in the society of the time.

Muhammad was dissatisfied with the pagan beliefs followed by most of the Meccans, and he took to meditating in the mountains outside the city, seeking a deeper spirituality and relationship to the divine. It was during one of these retreats, on 27 Ramadan 610, that he was approached by the angel Gabriel, who revealed to him the first verses of the *Qur'an*, the Muslim holy book, initiating what would be an ongoing series of revelations that would take place during the rest of Muhammad's lifetime. These revelations called humans to reject idol-worship and to return to good behaviour and the worship of the one true God, the same deity followed by the Christians and the Jews. Muhammad had been appointed by God as **Rasul Allah**, and it was now his duty to bring God's message to humanity.



Figure 2.2 The cave in which Muhammad received the first revelation, now a popular stop for pilgrims visiting Mecca.

The Prophet began preaching the following year, attracting converts from his own household (starting with Khadija) and others. However, he also encountered opposition from the leaders in Mecca, as his message opposed the dominant pagan faith and thus threatened the wealth that visits from pilgrims brought into the city. As the Prophet, he also became the *de facto* leader of the new Muslim community, which threatened the authority of the traditional tribal leaders of the city. Muslims began suffering from verbal and physical attacks, and the situation came to a head in 619, when both Khadija and Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle and principal protector, died. Muhammad began seeking support outside Mecca, and in 622 he and his followers emigrated to the oasis of Yathrib, some 200 miles to the north, after he was invited to help the community there resolve a bitter feud between two tribes that was tearing it apart. This emigration is known in Arabic as the *hijra*, and is the event from which Muslims date their calendar.¹ Most of the Yathribis converted to Islam, although there were also a number of Jewish tribes who maintained their faith. Yathrib became known as **Madīnat al-Nabi**, often shortened to **al-Madīna**, and rendered as Medina in English.

Circumstances drove Muhammad into a war with Mecca. If Islam was ever to become more than a local cult, he would need the expertise of the Meccans, and Medina also needed to be economically independent, which meant securing resources controlled by Mecca. Muhammad justified the war because the Meccans had opposed Islam, persecuted its followers, and were preventing others from practicing the faith. Over the course of eight years, during which there were three major battles and a number of raids and skirmishes, he fought the Meccans to a standstill and eventually managed to take over the city itself in 630. The Ka'ba, a **cuboid** building in the central sacred area of the city that the Meccans had used as a pagan shrine, was confirmed as the most important holy site in Islam, constructed by Abraham and his son Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs.

During this period Muhammad also had to deal with opposition from three of the Jewish tribes of Medina, who were exiled or, in the case of the third tribe, enslaved and executed. This has been seen by some modern commentators as the origin of Muslim-Jewish hostility, but such a view misunderstands the circumstances. The problem at the time was not the Jews' religion (even though they did not accept the Prophet's message), but rather the fact that they had behaved treacherously and broken agreements, and in the process were also undermining Muhammad's ability to spread Islam; arguably, by the customs of the time, the first two tribes got off lightly. Modern hostility between Muslims and Jews has much more to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than events in the 7th century, despite the efforts of some to claim the existence of a historic **antipathy**.

1. Muslims use a lunar calendar of 12 months. Thus the Muslim year is shorter than the solar year, and festivals and holy days move as the years pass.

Over the last two years of his life, Muhammad extended Islam's influence over the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. This was achieved mostly through diplomacy, and most of the time the Prophet received delegations from the various tribes of the region. Christians and Jews, seen as earlier recipients of the divine revelation, were allowed to keep their faith provided that they accepted Muslim authority and paid a poll tax. Pagans were required to convert to Islam. By the time that he died on 8 June 632, Muhammad and Islam's authority were acknowledged in most of Arabia. It would be left to his successors to take the message further.



Figure 2.3 The Ka'ba in Mecca. The area surrounding the Ka'ba is known as the haram.

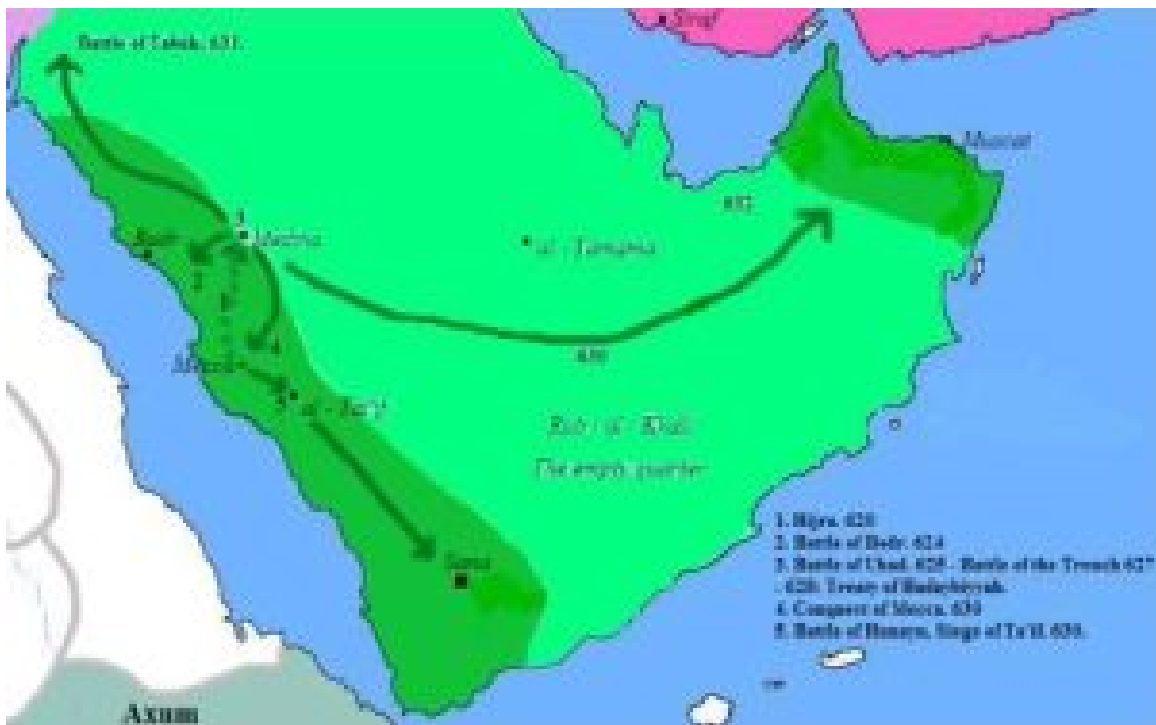


Figure 2.4 The spread of Islam to 632.

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An Account of the First Revelation to the Prophet

NIALL CHRISTIE

Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, from *Sahih* (Correct [Hadith])

After the death of Muhammad, the Muslims were left to decide how they were best to practice Islam without the Prophet's guidance. Within about a century scholars had begun compiling stories of the sayings and actions of the Prophet and his Companions known as **hadith**, which are still used alongside the *Qur'an* to elaborate on Islamic theological beliefs, ritual practices, and legal teachings. These reports are also known collectively as the **Sunna**. Scholars also began developing practices that would allow them to establish the authenticity of any given *hadith*, including assessing the chains of transmitters by whom these stories were passed down, in order to help ensure that Muslim beliefs and practices were as correct as possible.

Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (810-870) was a scholar of *hadith* from Bukhara in modern-day Uzbekistan. His compendium, known as the **Sahih** is one of the two most highly-regarded collections of *hadith* among Sunni Muslims.¹ The other, also known by the title *Sahih*, is by a Persian scholar named Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (btw. 817 and 821-875).

The following account is drawn from Al-Bukhari's *Sahih*, and is one of a number of versions that we have of the story of the first revelation to the Prophet, which are drawn from a range of biographies and *hadith* collections. As indicated at the beginning, this version was originally narrated by one of the Prophet's wives, 'A'isha (d. 678). The translation has been edited for clarity and consistency.

Al-Bukhari on the First Revelation

Yahya ibn Bukayr told us that al-Layth told us, on the authority of 'Uqayl, [who spoke] on the authority of Ibn Shihab, [who spoke] on the authority of 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, [who spoke] on the authority of 'A'isha (the mother of the faithful believers), who said: The commencement of the Divine Inspiration to Allah's Messenger (may God bless him and grant him salvation) was in the form of good dreams which came true like bright daylight, and then the love of seclusion was bestowed upon him. He used to go in seclusion in the cave of Hira'² where he used to worship (Allah alone) continuously for many days before his desire to see his family. He used to take with him the journey food for the stay and then come back to (his wife) Khadija to take his food likewise again till suddenly the Truth descended upon him while he was in the cave of Hira'. The angel³ came to him and asked him to read. The Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) replied, "I do not know how to read." The Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) added, "The angel caught me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked

1. Followers of the majority form of Islam, roughly 85% of the Muslims in the world.

2. Mt. Hira', at the time a mountain on the outskirts of Mecca, though the city has now grown around it.

3. Gabriel.

me to read and I replied, 'I do not know how to read.' Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time till I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read but again I replied, 'I do not know how to read (or what shall I read)?' Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said, 'Read in the name of your Lord, who has created (all that exists), created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.'" (Qur'an 96: 1-3).⁴ Then Allah's Messenger (may God bless him and grant him salvation) returned with the Inspiration and with his heart beating severely. Then he went to Khadija bint Khuwaylid and said, "Cover me! Cover me!" They covered him till his fear was over and after that he told her everything that had happened and said, "I fear that something may happen to me." Khadija replied, "Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the **destitute**, serve your guests generously and assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones." Khadija then accompanied him to her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal ibn Asad ibn 'Abd al-'Uzza, who, during the pre-Islamic period, became a Christian and used to write the writing with Hebrew letters. He would write from the Gospel in Hebrew as much as Allah wished him to write. He was an old man and had lost his eyesight. Khadija said to Waraqa, "Listen to the story of your nephew, O my cousin!" Waraqa asked, "O my nephew! What have you seen?" Allah's Messenger (may God bless him and grant him salvation) described whatever he had seen. Waraqa said, "This is the same one who keeps the secrets (angel Gabriel) whom Allah had sent to Moses. I wish I were young and could live up to the time when your people would turn you out." Allah's Messenger (may God bless him and grant him salvation) asked, "Will they drive me out?" Waraqa replied in the affirmative and said, "Anyone (man) who came with something similar to what you have brought was treated with hostility; and if I should remain alive till the day when you will be turned out then I would support you strongly." But after a few days Waraqa died and the Divine Inspiration was also paused for a while.

Questions for Consideration

1. What image of the Prophet do you get from this account? What values are being taught?
2. Why might it be important that the Prophet was not able to read?
3. What roles do Khadija and Waraqa play in the narrative?

4. The view of most Muslims is that on this occasion the first five verses of Sura 96 of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet.

What Muslims Believe

NIALL CHRISTIE

The Qur'an:



Figure 2.5 Page from the so-called Blue Qur'an, North Africa or Southern Spain, 9th or 10th Century.

The first source of Muslim belief is the *Qur'an*, which is regarded by Muslims as the very word of God, transmitted to humanity through His Prophet. It is seen as the final, perfect version of the revelation that was previously made humans, who misunderstood or distorted its teachings on earlier occasions. The book itself is roughly the size of the New Testament, and deals with a number of themes:

- God: We are told about the nature of God. He is omnipotent and omniscient, but also kind and benevolent to humanity. Most importantly, God is *one single being*, with no partners, associates, or offspring. Idolatry is thus fiercely opposed. Meanwhile Christians and Jews are also criticised for associating other figures with God. In particular, the Christian claim that Jesus is the son of God, and also God, is explicitly refuted; indeed, in the text Jesus himself is described as denying the truth of such a claim.
- Stories of the Prophets: The *Qur'an* also recounts or alludes to stories of the prophets, most of whom would be recognised by readers of Bible. In the Muslim view, the first prophet was Adam, and then God communicated with

many subsequent figures such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus; the latter was the precursor to Muhammad, the very last and Seal of the Prophets. Of these figures, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus were given scriptures to share with humanity, but as noted above, humans misunderstood or distorted these revelations, making the new revelation to Muhammad necessary.

- Legal Teaching: The text describes or at least alludes to a range of legal teachings, making it a social contract as well as a book of religious doctrine. Thus one may consult the *Qur'an* to establish how to divide up inheritance, how to treat the women in the community, how to look after the poor, the correct manner in which to undertake warfare, and how to deal with non-Muslims. Not all the teachings in the text are clearly stated, however, and as time went on the Muslims periodically encountered situations where Qur'anic teaching could not be applied easily, and so legal scholars used *hadith* material (see above) and further legal argumentation to develop the *Qur'an's* teachings into a full-blown legal code known as the *shari'a*.
- The Day of Judgment: The *Qur'an* tells us that we will all die at the times appointed for us. Then, at time known only to God, we will all be resurrected and judged according to our deeds, finding our way to Paradise or Hell as appropriate. Both these places are described in great detail in the *Qur'an*; Paradise is a garden, with trees and rivers, where food and drink are plentiful, there are gems and gold, and (depending on the translation) beautiful maidens who will be heavenly wives for the pious. Hell is a place of burning fires and eternal torment.

The “Pillars of Islam”:

To avoid Hell and gain a place in Paradise, Muslims are expected to believe in God and His scripture, and to express that belief through their actions, obeying Islamic legal teaching and seeking to do good. As part of this, Muslim daily life is regulated through five practices commonly known as the “Pillars of Islam”. These are as follows:



Figure 2.6 Prayers at the Imam 'Ali shrine, Najaf, Iraq, in 2014.

1. *Shahada* (profession of faith): Muslims testify to the truth of their faith through two statements: There is no god except God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. These statements are made frequently in Muslim ritual practices, such as during *salat*, below.
2. *Salat* (ritual prayer): Most Muslims conduct ritual prayer five times a day, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and later in the evening. The ritual prayer consists of a set of standard invocations and recitations, accompanied by changes of bodily posture, from standing, to bowing, to kneeling, to prostrating oneself before God; the number of times that one does this depends on the time of prayer. *Salat* can be performed anywhere, but if possible it should be conducted facing Mecca. A **mosque** is a place set aside for prayer, and Muslims are particularly encouraged to join their fellows in the mosque for Friday noon prayers, when they will also hear a sermon. Muslims do, of course, also conduct informal personal prayer in addition to the formal *salat* ritual.
3. *Zakat* (almsgiving): Muslims are expected to donate a portion of their wealth to charity every year.
4. *Sawm* (fasting): During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn until dusk, abstaining from food, drink, smoking and sexual activity. Not all are required to fast: pregnant or nursing women, pre-pubescent children, the sick, the infirm, and travellers are either exempted or required to make up the fast later on. This practice is undertaken to commemorate the first revelation to Muhammad, and is seen by many Muslims as an opportunity to refocus their attention on their faith.
5. *Hajj* (greater pilgrimage): Once during their lifetime, if they are able, every Muslim should perform the greater pilgrimage to Mecca. This takes place at a set time of the year, in the Muslim month of Dhu'l-Hijja. The *hajj* involves a number of rituals, including visiting a number of sites in and around Mecca, and engaging in activities such as walking around the Ka'ba and throwing stones at pillars representing Satan.

- See [A step-by-step guide to the hajj](#) from AlJazeera.
- Watch [Seven things you don't know about the hajj](#) from the BBC.

Jihad:

Jihad is a concept that is often misunderstood in the modern day. At the basic level, the word means “striving”. In Muslim teaching, the term is associated with any sort of struggle for the faith. In times of war this can be a military struggle, though such activity must be conducted within a number of restrictions, including not harming non-combatants (Muslim or non-Muslim), not engaging in **wanton** destruction of property, and not deliberately killing oneself on the battlefield. However, Muslims see the military aspect of *jihad* as but one part of a much wider concept. One can also wage *jihad* by speaking out for social justice, for example. From the earliest days, the concept was also understood to encompass the inner struggle that one wages against one's own inner sinfulness, and by about the 12th century Muslim religious scholars, especially those influenced by mystical ideas, had elaborated a theory of *jihad* that saw this inner struggle as the most important, and a prerequisite for going out to wage the external struggle. Thus the concept of *jihad* is a rather more complex one than some media outlets or extremists would have us believe.

Interfaith Relations:

Since the earliest days of the faith, Christians and Jews were allowed to live in Muslim communities, provided that they paid poll tax, accepted Muslim authority, and did not cause trouble. Over time this usage became extended to other non-Muslims as the Muslim world expanded. Islamic law does contain certain social restrictions that may be placed on non-

Muslims if the ruler chooses, but many rulers kept these to minimum or chose not to impose them, with the result that at times non-Muslims rose to positions of prominence within Muslim states. There were exceptions, of course, of whom one of the most notorious was the Egyptian caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 996-1021), who persecuted Christians and attained particular notoriety in 1009 when he ordered the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. However, in both the middle ages and the modern day there were plenty of cases of co-operation and co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims, even in face of opposition from Muslim authorities; one of the most striking recent examples occurred during the Egyptian revolution of 2011, when Christian and Muslim protestors co-operated closely with each other to advance their shared goal of regime change.



Figure 2.7 Egyptian protestors in 2011. The man on the right holds a sign saying, “Muslim and Christian, one hand”.

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Extracts from The Qur'an

NIALL CHRISTIE

Suras 1 and 47

The following are two *suras*¹ from the *Qur'an*. According to tradition, *Sura 1* was revealed early on in the Prophet's mission, before he emigrated from Mecca to Medina, while *Sura 47* was revealed later, at Medina. The texts here were translated by Maulvi Sher Ali and edited by Malik Ghulam Farid. The translation has subsequently been edited for clarity.

Sura 1

1. In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.
2. All praise is due to Allah alone, Lord of all the worlds.
3. The Gracious, the Merciful.
4. Master of the Day of Judgment.
5. You alone do we worship and You alone do we implore for help.
6. Guide us in the straight path,
7. The path of those on whom You have bestowed Your favours, those who have not incurred Your displeasure and those who have not gone astray.

Hear a [recitation of Sura 1](#) from Quran Reader.

Sura 47

1. In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.
2. Those who disbelieve and hinder men from the way of Allah—He renders their works vain.

1. Arabic: "chapters".

3. But as for those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in that which has been revealed to Muhammad—and it is the truth from their Lord—He removes from them their sins and sets right their affairs.
4. That is because those who disbelieve follow falsehood while those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus does Allah set forth for men their lessons by **similitudes**.
5. And when you meet in regular battle those who disbelieve, smite their necks; and, when you have overcome them, by causing great slaughter among them, bind fast the fetters—then afterwards either release them as a favour or by taking ransom—until the war lays down its burdens. That is the ordinance. And if Allah had so pleased, He could have punished them Himself, but He has willed that He may try some of you by others. And those who are killed in the way of Allah—He will never render their works vain.
6. He will guide them to success and will improve their condition.
7. And will admit them into the Garden which He has made known to them.
8. O you who believe! If you help the cause of Allah, He will help you and will make your steps firm.
9. But those who disbelieve, **perdition** is their lot; and He will make their works vain.
10. That is because they hate what Allah has revealed; so He has made their works vain.
11. Have they not traveled in the earth and seen what was the end of those who were before them? Allah utterly destroyed them, and for the disbelievers there will be the like thereof.
12. That is because Allah is the Protector of those who believe, and the disbelievers have no protector.
13. Verily, Allah will cause those who believe and do good works to enter the Gardens underneath which streams flow; while those who disbelieve enjoy themselves and eat even as the cattle eat, and the Fire will be their last resort.
14. And how many a township, mightier than your town which has driven you out, have We destroyed, and they had no helper.
15. Then, is he who takes his stand upon a clear proof from his Lord like those to whom the evil of their deeds is made to look attractive and who follow their low desires?
16. A description of the Garden promised to the righteous: Therein are streams of water which corrupts not; and streams of milk of which the taste changes not; and streams of wine, a delight to those who drink; and streams of clarified honey. And in it they will have all kinds of fruit, and forgiveness from their Lord. Can those who enjoy such bliss be like those who abide in the Fire and who are given boiling water to drink so that it tears their **bowels**?
17. And among them are some who seems to listen to you till, when they go forth from thy presence, they say to those who have been given knowledge, “What has he been talking about just now?” These are they upon whose hearts Allah has set a seal, and who follow their own evil desires.
18. But as for those who follow guidance, He adds to their guidance, and bestows on them righteousness suited to their condition.
19. The disbelievers wait not but for the Hour,² that it should come upon them suddenly. The Signs thereof have already come. But of what avail will their **admonition** be to them when it has actually come upon them.
20. Know, therefore, that there is no god other than Allah, and ask protection for your human **frailties**,

and for believing men and believing women. And Allah knows the place where you move about and the place where you stay.

21. And those who believe say, "Why is not a *sura* revealed?" But when a decisive *sura* is revealed and fighting is mentioned therein, you see those in whose hearts is a disease, looking towards you like the look of one who is fainting on account of approaching death. So woe to them!
22. Their attitude should have been one of obedience and of calling people to good. And when the matter was determined upon, it was good for them if they were true to Allah.
23. Would you not then, if you are placed in authority, create disorder in the land and sever your ties of kinship?
24. It is these whom Allah has cursed, so that He has made them deaf and has made their eyes blind.
25. Will they not, then, ponder over the *Qur'an*, or, is it that there are locks on their hearts?
26. Surely, those who turn their backs after guidance has become manifest to them, Satan has seduced them and holds out false hopes to them.
27. That is because they said to those who hate what Allah has revealed, "We will obey you in some matters," and Allah knows their secrets.
28. But how will they fare when the angels will cause them to die, **smiting** their faces and their backs?
29. That is because they followed that which displeased Allah, and disliked the seeking of His pleasure. So He rendered their works vain.
30. Do those in whose hearts is a disease suppose that Allah will not bring to light their malice?
31. And if We pleased, We could show them to you so that you should know them by their marks. And you shall, surely, recognize them by the tone of their speech. And Allah knows your deeds.
32. And We will, surely, try you, until We make manifest those among you who strive for the cause of Allah and those who are steadfast. And We will make known the true facts about you.
33. Those, who disbelieve and hinder men from the way of Allah and oppose the Messenger after guidance has become manifest to them, shall not harm Allah in the least; and He will make their works fruitless.
34. O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and make not your works vain.
35. Verily, those who disbelieve and hinder people from the way of Allah, and then die while they are disbelievers—Allah certainly, will not forgive them.
36. So be not slack and sue not for peace, for you will, certainly, have the upper hand. And Allah is with you, and He will not deprive you of the reward of your actions.
37. The life of this world is but a sport and a pastime, and if you believe and be righteous, He will give you your rewards, and will not ask of you your wealth.
38. Were He to ask it of you and press you, you would be stingy, and He would bring to light your malice.
39. Behold! You are those who are called upon to spend in the way of Allah; but of you there are some who are stingy. And whoso is stingy, is stingy only against his own soul. And Allah is Self-Sufficient, and it is you who are needy. And if you turn your backs, He will bring in your place another people; then they will not be like you.

Hear a [recitation of Sura 47](#) from the Holy Quran Channel.

Questions for Consideration

1. Who is the speaker in each of these texts? What can we tell about them from the texts?
2. What message is the reader meant to take from these texts?
3. What do these texts tell us about the environments in which they were revealed?

The Pact of 'Umar

NIALL CHRISTIE

Interactions with Non-Muslims

After the rapid expansion of the Muslim dominion in the 7th century, Muslim leaders were required to work out a way of dealing with non-Muslims, who remained in the majority in many areas for centuries. The solution was to develop the notion of the *dhimmi*.¹ *Dhimmi*s were required to pay an extra tax, but usually they were unmolested. This compares well with the treatment **meted** out to non-Christians in Christian Europe. The Pact of 'Umar is supposed to have been the peace accord offered by the caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab to the Christians of Syria, a "pact" which formed the pattern for later interaction. The association with this caliph 'Umar is problematic, however; it is likely that the regulations were actually only formalised under the Umayyad caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (a.k.a. 'Umar II, r. 717-20). The text below is drawn from *Siraj al-Muluk*,² a "mirror for princes"³ work completed in Egypt in 1122 by a Spanish Muslim scholar and author named Abu Bakr al-Turtushi (d. 1126).

We heard from 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Ghanam [died 78/697] as follows: When 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, may God be pleased with him, accorded a peace to the Christians of Syria, we wrote to him as follows:

In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate. This is a letter to the servant of God 'Umar [ibn al-Khattab], Commander of the Faithful, from the Christians of such-and-such a city. When you came against us, we asked you for safe-conduct⁴ for ourselves, our descendants, our property, and the people of our community, and we undertook the following obligations toward you:

We shall not build, in our cities or in their neighborhood, new monasteries, churches, convents, or monks' cells, nor shall we repair, by day or by night, such of them as fall in ruins or are situated in the quarters of the Muslims.

We shall keep our gates wide open for passersby and travelers. We shall give board and lodging to all Muslims who pass our way for three days.

We shall not give shelter in our churches or in our dwellings to any spy, nor hide him from the Muslims.

We shall not teach the *Qur'an* to our children.

We shall not manifest our religion publicly nor convert anyone to it. We shall not prevent any of our kin from entering Islam if they wish it.

1. Arabic: A complex word that includes the meanings "protected person," "one under obligations" and "adherent of a pact,;" in this case, the agreement between the Muslim rulers and their non-Muslim subjects.

2. Arabic: "A Lamp for Rulers."

3. A guide to princely conduct aiming to influence the conduct of rulers. Such works were produced in both Europe and the Muslim world in the middle ages.

4. *Aman* in Arabic

We shall show respect toward the Muslims, and we shall rise from our seats when they wish to sit.

We shall not seek to resemble the Muslims by imitating any of their garments, the *qalansuwa*,⁵ the turban, footwear, or the parting of the hair. We shall not speak as they do, nor shall we adopt their *kunyas*.⁶

We shall not mount on saddles, nor shall we **gird** swords nor bear any kind of arms nor carry them on our persons.

We shall not engrave Arabic inscriptions on our seals.

We shall not sell **fermented** drinks.

We shall clip the fronts of our heads.

We shall always dress in the same way wherever we may be, and we shall bind the *zunnar*⁷ round our waists.

We shall not display our crosses or our books in the roads or markets of the Muslims. We shall use only **clappers** in our churches very softly. We shall not raise our voices when following our dead. We shall not show lights on any of the roads of the Muslims or in their markets. We shall not bury our dead near the Muslims.

We shall not take slaves who have been allotted to Muslims.

We shall not build houses **overtopping** the houses of the Muslims.

(When I brought the letter to 'Umar, may God be pleased with him, he added, "We shall not strike a Muslim.")

We accept these conditions for ourselves and for the people of our community, and in return we receive safe-conduct.

If we in any way violate these undertakings for which we ourselves stand surety, we forfeit our covenant,⁸ and we become liable to the penalties for **contumacy** and **sedition**.

'Umar ibn al-Khattab replied: Sign what they ask, but add two clauses and impose them in addition to those which they have undertaken. They are: "They shall not buy anyone made prisoner by the Muslims," and "Whoever strikes a Muslim with deliberate intent shall forfeit the protection of this pact."

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the status of non-Muslims under Muslim rule like? Is it good? How about compared to other

5. A type of hat.

6. A particular naming convention by which a father or mother adopts the name Abu (father of) or Umm (mother of), followed the name of their first son.

7. A type of belt used to indicate that the wearer was a *dhimmi*.

8. Or "pact." *Dhimma* in Arabic.

societies of the time?

2. With whom does the power lie in this contractual relationship?
3. Given that it is likely of later provenance, why do you think that Muslim authors ascribed this pact to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab?

Images of Muhammad

NIALL CHRISTIE

From as far back as we can trace, Islam has had a mixed relationship with depictions of living things, and of the Prophet in particular, in art. The Qur'an was revealed in a region where the religion of the majority of the people was paganism, characterised in particular by frequent idol worship. The holy text, not surprisingly, repeatedly and emphatically opposes this practice, but at the same time, it contains no explicit prohibition of the depiction of living things by humans. The hadith include some stories that seem to prohibit depictions of this type, but there has been debate about to what extent they should be seen as universally applicable. The end result is that Muslim attitudes to images of living things, including the Prophet, have been, and continue to be, variable depending on the **temporal**, geographical and cultural context.

At times Muslim depictions of the Prophet demonstrate no qualms at all, resulting in pieces like the 15th-century image to the right, in which we see the first revelation being made by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet.

Other works demonstrate more reluctance to provide a full depiction of Muhammad, and one of the methods that artists have used is to veil his face, as in the example below of Muhammad's ascension¹. Note that the angels accompanying the Prophet are not veiled, so the artist is not simply avoiding depicting the faces of living things as a whole here, but is only doing so with the figure of Muhammad. The fact that the Prophet is veiled can also be interpreted as having the effect of turning him into an "everyman" figure, someone whom Muslims can seek to emulate in their own practice of their faith.



Figure 2.8 The first revelation to Muhammad, from a copy of the *Majma' al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Histories), ca. 1425; Herat, Afghanistan.



Figure 2.9 The *mi'raj* (the Prophet ascends to heaven), c. 1575, Persia.

Yet despite the fact that depictions of the Prophet, and other living creatures, can be found widespread throughout Islamic art, one thing that is striking is that one generally does not see such depictions in explicitly religious contexts such as mosques (the major exception are vegetal motifs, representing Paradise), and there are also very few Muslim **pictorial** depictions of God. Such avoidance reflects Muslims' desire to avoid idolatry, even if it might be accidental, as well as a desire to render suitable respect to God and the Prophet.

This brings us, of course, to the question of controversies surrounding depictions of Muhammad in modern media such as the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (in 2005) or the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* (in 2011 and 2012). While undoubtedly some of the protestors who took part in the demonstrations that followed the publication of these were motivated by a

1. Ascension. According to Muslim tradition, during one night early on in his mission, before the hijra, Muhammad travelled to Jerusalem and then ascended to Paradise, where he met God and some of the prophets who had come before him.

sense of offense at the act of depicting Muhammad, what was much more offensive to the protestors was the fact that these depictions were clearly meant to be insulting (something that was exacerbated, in the first case, by the fact that in 2003 Jyllands-Posten had refused to publish a cartoon of Jesus on the grounds that Christians might be offended). It is also undeniable that some Muslim extremists took the controversies as an opportunity to incite protests to become more violent or to claim that their terrorist acts were enacted in response to the events. The Charlie-Hebdo attack of January 2015 is one example of this, and was condemned by Muslims across the globe.

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The Rashidun and the Early Muslim Conquests

NIALL CHRISTIE

The death of the Prophet left the Muslim community in a dilemma; for all its virtues, the Qur'an did not provide clear guidance regarding how one should choose the next leader. After some discussion an eventual approximate consensus was reached, with the choice falling on Abu Bakr (r. 632–34), who was an old friend and by now the father-in-law of the Prophet, an early convert to Islam, and widely respected for his wisdom and knowledge of the tribes of Arabia. Abu Bakr thus became the first of four rulers chosen (approximately) by consensus of the community and known to Islamic history as the *rashidun*, a title that is used to distinguish the period of their rule from the dynasties of rulers who came after them.

The Rashidun, 632–661	
Caliph	Reign
Abu Bakr	632–634
‘Umar ibn al-Khattab	634–644
‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan	644–656
‘Ali ibn Abi Talib	656–661

Abu Bakr is said to have been the first to have taken the title *khalifat rasul allah*,¹ which we anglicise as “caliph.” This was an important choice of title; the Qur'an clearly states that Muhammad was the last prophet, so Abu Bakr could not claim such a position, but the early Muslims also felt that the emphasis on God's supremacy and communal decision-making in the holy text meant that it would not be appropriate for Abu Bakr to claim the position of a king. Thus the title established Abu Bakr as a leader while also deferring to the authority of God and the Prophet, and also remained ambiguous enough for the role to adapt as time went on. Early caliphs also used the title *amir al-mu'minin*,² which denoted the caliph's position as a politico-military leader.

Military leadership was going to be needed, as after the Prophet died many tribes in Arabia assumed that they did not have to be Muslim any more, nor pay taxes to Medina. Abu Bakr thus spent his reign at war, forcing these tribes back into compliance. These wars are known as the wars of the *ridda*.³ Meanwhile, some Muslims were already launching raids north out the Arabian Peninsula. It is likely that various motivations encouraged this. Undoubtedly some were encouraged by the verses in the Qur'an that call on Muslims to fight against unbelievers. At the same time, the holy text also offers those who fight for the faith both material and spiritual rewards, in that the taking of plunder from defeated enemies is permitted, while those who die in the military jihad become martyrs and are offered a place in Paradise. As the Muslims expanded north they were quickly joined by warriors from the Ghassanid and Lakhmid buffer states, for by this time their alliances with the Byzantines and Persians had broken down, and they were only too happy to plunder the lands of their former paymasters.

The first major gains were made during the reign of the second of the *rashidun*, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (r. 634–44). In 636 Muslim forces destroyed the major Syrian Byzantine force at the Battle of the Yarmuk River. With no major army left to defend the region, the Muslims took control of Syria and the Holy Land. Damascus itself surrendered in 637. The conquest was aided by the acquiescence of most of the local Christians of the area, for most of them followed forms of Christianity that the Byzantines considered heretical and had been persecuted for it, and so were content to see their overlords replaced by others who would largely leave them in peace.

1. Arabic: “successor to the Messenger of God.”

2. Arabic: “commander of the believers.”

3. Arabic: “apostasy.”

The same phenomenon assisted the Muslim campaign to the east, where again Christians and Jews who had been persecuted by the Zoroastrian authorities in Persia acquiesced to Muslim rule. In 637 the Muslims destroyed the Persian army at Qadisiyya and took the Persian capital of Ctesiphon, near the modern day site of Baghdad. With no capital left, the Persian Empire began to fragment and fall to the Muslims on a province-by-province basis, though the conquest was going to be a long, hard-fought affair.

Back in the west, the Muslims began their expansion into Egypt in 639. By 642 they had taken the country, including its capital, Alexandria. The majority of the Christian inhabitants of Egypt were Monotheist Copts, who again had been persecuted by the Byzantines, and thus we again see the acquiescence of local populations to Muslim rule and the removal of previously oppressive overlords. The Muslims set up a garrison town at Fustat, which is now a part of the city of Cairo.

‘Umar was the first caliph who sought to deal with the question of Muslims settling in the regions that they had conquered, and he was determined that the expanded state should still run on an Islamic basis. Fustat was one of a number of garrison towns set up with the intention that the Muslims should live apart from the conquered peoples, rather than risk being corrupted by local customs or non-Muslim religions; indeed, such garrison towns always included at least one mosque and were run according to rigorous and firm interpretations of Islamic law. ‘Umar is credited with tightening up and standardising Islamic rituals and laws, as well as with setting up the Islamic calendar and establishing a register of all Muslims, with priority in claims to plunder being given to the earliest converts.

However, ‘Umar was killed by a prisoner-of-war in 644. He was succeeded by ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan (r. 644-656). ‘Uthman’s reign saw a continuation of the Muslim expansion in Persia, and in 655 the Muslims took to the sea, defeating a Byzantine fleet and taking Cyprus. But a year later the Muslim conquests ground to a halt as the Muslim community turned against itself. ‘Uthman earned the enmity of a number of groups in society. He tried to assert greater control of state finances, with the result that old families from Medina who had invested in the new provinces found themselves forced to redirect their investments back to Arabia. The caliph is also credited with having standardised the text of the Qur’an, but not all accepted the version that he settled on. He was also accused of nepotism, appointing family members to the best positions in government, rather than recruiting on the basis of seniority within Islam. Finally, he was accused of not sharing plunder from campaigns with those who had fought for it (the primary means through which troops were paid at the time), instead taking it for himself and the government at Medina. Discontent came to a head in 656, when troops from Egypt and Iraq assassinated the caliph. They raised to power the son-in-law of the Prophet, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (r. 656-61). Not all agreed with their choice, and the result was civil war.



Figure 2.10 Remains of the Sassanid Palace at Ctesiphon, photographed in 1864.



Figure 2.11 Muslim expansion in the time of Muhammad and the four rashidun caliphs.

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An Account of the Muslim Conquest of Syria

NIALL CHRISTIE

Al-Baladhuri, from *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* (Book of the Conquests of Lands)

In the face of the Muslim expansion, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius gathered a large army which met the Muslim army at the Battle of the Yarmuk in Syria on 20 August 636. It was a crushing victory which gave Syria to the Muslims. The account of al-Baladhuri (d. c. 892) shows the episodic and personal character of early Islamic historiography but also emphasizes the hostility of Syria to Byzantium and the welcome which the inhabitants of the former province accorded to their invaders. The translation has been edited for clarity.

Al-Baladhuri on the Muslim Conquest of Syria

A description of the battle: Heraclius gathered large bodies of Greeks, Syrians, Mesopotamians and Armenians numbering about 200,000. This army he put under the command of one of his choice men and sent as a vanguard Jabala ibn al-Ayham al-Ghassani at the head of the “naturalized” Arabs¹ of Syria of the tribes of Lakhm, Judham and others, resolving to fight the Muslims so that he might either win or withdraw to the land of the Greeks and live in Constantinople. The Muslims gathered together and the Greek army marched against them. The battle they fought at al-Yarmuk² was of the fiercest and bloodiest kind. Al-Yarmuk is a river. In this battle 24,000 Muslims took part. The Greeks and their followers in this battle tied themselves to each other by chains, so that no one might set his hope on flight. By Allah’s help, some 70,000 of them were put to death, and their remnants took to flight, reaching as far as Palestine, Antioch, Aleppo, Mesopotamia and Armenia. In the battle of al-Yarmuk certain Muslim women took part and fought violently. Among them was Hind, daughter of ‘Utbah and mother of Mu’awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, who repeatedly exclaimed, “Cut the arms of these ‘uncircumcised’ with your swords!” Her husband Abu Sufyan had come to Syria as a volunteer desiring to see his sons, and so he brought his wife with him. He then returned to al-Madina³ where he died, year 31,⁴ at the age of 88. Others say he died in Syria. When the news of his death was carried to his daughter, Umm Habiba, she waited until the third day on which she ordered some yellow paint and covered with it her arms and face saying, “I would not have done that, had I not heard the Prophet say, ‘A woman should not be in mourning for more than three days over anyone except her husband.’” It is stated that she did likewise when she received the news of her brother Yazid’s death. But Allah knows best.

Those who lost an eye or suffered martyrdom: Abu Sufyan ibn Harb was one-eyed. He had lost his eye in the

1. *Musta’riba* in Arabic, “those who seek to be Arabs”: Non-Arabs who became Arabised in language and culture.

2. Hieromax.

3. Medina.

4. Al-Baladhuri uses the Muslim calendar. The date is 653 CE.

battle of al-Ta'if.⁵ In the battle of al-Yarmuk, however, al-Ash'ath ibn Qays, Hashim ibn 'Utbah ibn Abi Waqqas al-Zuhri (i.e., al-Mirqal) and Qays ibn Makshuh, each lost an eye. In this battle 'Amir ibn Abi Waqqas al-Zuhri fell a martyr. It is this 'Amir who once carried the letter of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab assigning Abu 'Ubaydah to the governorship of Syria. Others say he was a victim of the plague; still others report that he suffered martyrdom in the battle of Ajnadayn,⁶ but all that is not true.

Habib ibn Maslamah pursues the fugitives: Abu 'Ubayda put Habib ibn Maslama al-Fihri at the head of a cavalry detachment charged with pursuing the fugitive enemy, and Habib set out killing every man whom he could reach.

The story of Jabala: Jabala ibn al-Ayham sided with the *ansar*⁷ saying, "Ye are our brethren and the sons of our fathers," and professed Islam. After the arrival of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab in Syria, year 17,⁸ Jabala had a dispute with one of the [tribe of] Muzayna and knocked out his eye. 'Umar ordered that he be punished, upon which Jabala said, "Is his eye like mine? Never, by Allah, shall I abide in a town where I am under authority." He then **apostatized** and went to the land of the Greeks. This Jabala was the king of Ghassan and the successor of al-Harith ibn Abi Shimir.

According to another report, when Jabala came to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, he was still a Christian. 'Umar asked him to accept Islam and pay *sadaqa*⁹ but he refused saying, "I shall keep my faith and pay *sadaqa*." 'Umar's answer was, "If you keep your faith, you will have to pay poll-tax." The man refused, and 'Umar added, "We have only three alternatives for you: Islam, tax or going where you wish." Accordingly, Jabala left with 30,000 men to the land of the Greeks.¹⁰ 'Ubayda ibn al-Samit gently reproved 'Umar saying, "If you had accepted *sadaqa* from him and treated him in a friendly way, he would have become Muslim."

In the year 21,¹¹ 'Umar directed 'Umayr ibn Sa'd al-Ansari at the head of a great army against the land of the Greeks, and put him in command of the summer expedition which was the first of its kind. 'Umar instructed him to treat Jabala ibn al-Ayham very kindly, and to try and appeal to him through the blood relationship between them, so that he should come back to the land of the Muslims with the understanding that he would keep his own faith and pay the amount of *sadaqa* he had agreed to pay. 'Umayr marched until he came to the land of the Greeks and proposed to Jabala what he was ordered by 'Umar to propose; but Jabala refused the offer and insisted on staying in the land of the Greeks. 'Umar then came into a place called al-Himar—a valley—which he destroyed putting its inhabitants to the sword. Hence the proverb, "In a more ruined state than the hollow of Himar."

Heraclius' adieu to Syria: When Heraclius¹² received the news about the troops in al-Yarmuk and the destruction of his army by the Muslims, he fled from Antioch to Constantinople, and as he passed al-Darb he

5. In 630 CE.

6. In 634 CE.

7. Arabic: "helpers," inhabitants of Yathrib who converted to Islam and assisted the original Muslims who emigrated from Mecca.

8. 638 CE.

9. A Muslim alms tax.

10. Asia Minor.

11. 641-42 CE.

12. Byzantine Emperor, r. 610-41.

turned and said, “Peace to you, O Syria, and what an excellent country this is for the enemy!”—referring to the numerous pastures in Syria.

The battle of al-Yarmuk took place in [the Muslim month of Rajab], year 15.¹³

Hubash loses his leg: According to Hisham ibn al-Kalbi, among those who witnessed the battle of al-Yarmuk was Hubash ibn Qays al-Qushayri, who killed many of the “uncircumcised” and lost his leg without feeling it. At last he began to look for it. Hence the verse of Suwar ibn Awfa:

Among us were Ibn ‘Attab and the one who went seeking his leg;
and among us was one who offered protection to the quarter,

Referring to Abu’l-Ruqayba.

Christians and Jews prefer Muslim rule: Abu Hafs al-Dimashqi [recounted] from Sa’id ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz: When Heraclius massed his troops against the Muslims and the Muslims heard that they were coming to meet them at al-Yarmuk, the Muslims refunded to the inhabitants of Hims the *kharaj*¹⁴ they had taken from them saying, “We are too busy to support and protect you. Take care of yourselves.” But the people of Hims replied, “We like your rule and justice far better than the state of oppression and tyranny in which we were. The army of Heraclius we shall indeed, with your *‘amil*’s¹⁵ help, repulse from the city.” The Jews rose and said, “We swear by the Torah, no governor of Heraclius shall enter the city of Hims unless we are first vanquished and exhausted!” Saying this, they closed the gates of the city and guarded them. The inhabitants of the other cities—Christian and Jew—that had capitulated to the Muslims, did the same, saying, “If Heraclius and his followers win over the Muslims we would return to our previous condition, otherwise we shall retain our present state so long as numbers are with the Muslims.” When by Allah’s help the “unbelievers” were defeated and the Muslims won, they opened the gates of their cities, went out with the singers and music players who began to play, and paid the *kharaj*.

Questions for Consideration

1. What images of the protagonists do you get from this text? Who are the heroes?
2. What values seem to be important to the Muslims, according to the way in which they are presented?
3. Can this text be seen as trustworthy or not? Why?

13. August 636 CE.

14. Tribute, here meaning the poll tax levied on non-Muslims under Muslim rule. While subject to obligations to their rulers, according to Islamic law non-Muslims under Muslim rule are also entitled to protection and fair treatment from their Muslim rulers.

15. Arabic: “governor.”

The First Fitna and the Origins of Shi'ism

NIALL CHRISTIE

'Ali ibn Abi Talib was a popular and influential member of the Muslim community. He was an early convert to Islam (many regard him as the first male to convert to Islam), an unwavering supporter of the Prophet, a brave warrior, the Prophet's cousin, and had become his son-in-law when he married the Prophet's daughter Fatima (d. 633). 'Ali had been considered for the position of caliph as early as the death of Muhammad (indeed, Shi'ites maintain that before he died the Prophet designated 'Ali to succeed him), but was not raised to the position until the death of 'Uthman. As indicated previously, 'Ali was raised to the caliphate by troops from Egypt and Iraq, and he soon gained further support in Medina, but not everyone agreed. The result was that the Muslim community became split, and a civil war broke out. This was the first fitna, an important Arabic word denoting both a civil war and time of trials or temptation, when the unity of the Muslim community was seriously threatened.

'Ali's election was initially opposed by a faction in Medina led by a number of friends and associates of the Prophet, including the Prophet's wife 'A'isha. They opposed 'Ali's elevation on the grounds that 'Ali was not seeking to bring the murderers of 'Uthman to justice (which, given that they were among his supporters, he could not do). Both sides gathered their forces, and in late 656 they met in battle near Basra in Iraq. The conflict is known as the Battle of the Camel, it is said, because 'A'isha watched it from camel-back. 'Ali's forces carried the day, the principal leaders of his opponents were killed, and 'A'isha went into retirement in Medina.

However, this was not the end of the opposition to 'Ali. According to tradition 'Uthman's widow sent her husband's bloodstained shirt to his closest relative, Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, who was at the time the governor of Syria. Mu'awiya now took up the calls for justice for the murder of 'Uthman and became the focus of opposition to 'Ali. The two men assembled their armies and confronted each other at Siffin, on the Euphrates, in 637. Neither side was keen to commit to a major battle, but after three months of occasional skirmishes, when serious fighting finally broke out, Mu'awiya's followers called for an arbitration, apparently after riding out with copies of the Qur'an on their lances to bring the conflict to a stop. 'Ali was forced to agree, but some of his followers objected and abandoned him; they became known as kharijis, from the Arabic verb *kharaja* (to go out) because they went out from 'Ali's army. The term later became extended to a number of both violent and non-violent movements who objected to the activities or beliefs of the majority of the Muslims.

The arbitration took place at Adhruh¹ in 658 or 659, but the results were inconclusive and no agreement was reached. 'Ali was by now also opposed by the kharijis, whom he defeated in battle and scattered in 659, but his support continued to decline. Meanwhile, Mu'awiya was able to secure the backing of increasing numbers of important tribal leaders and the governor of Egypt, and in 660 his followers acclaimed him as caliph in Damascus. The following year 'Ali was assassinated, while praying in the mosque at Kufa, by a khariji named Ibn Muljam, who is said to have used a poisoned sword. Some acclaimed 'Ali's son al-Hasan (d. 669) as the new caliph, but Mu'awiya intimidated him into going into retirement at Mecca. This did not mean, however, that supporters of 'Ali's family gave up, and they continued to assert the claims of the Prophet's family, through the line of 'Ali, to the caliphate. For them 'Ali became a symbol, a great man brought down by the impiety and malice of his enemies and the inconstancy of his allies. Thus he and his family, especially those born of Fatima, who

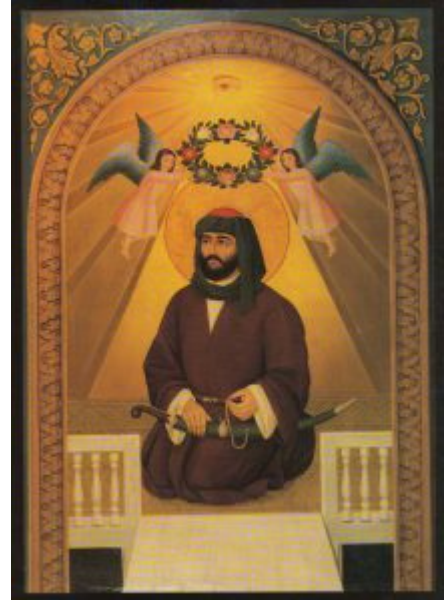


Figure 2.12 A 19th-Century Depiction of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib by the Armenian Artist Hakob Hovnatanyan.

1. Modern Udhruh, Jordan.

were after all direct descendants of the Prophet, became foci for protest movements, in particular those who objected to the conduct of the current rulers and demanded a more pious and just society.

Supporters of the claims of the family of 'Ali are known as shi'at 'Ali, "the party of 'Ali," which we anglicise as "Shi'ites." Over time they divided into a number of different groups, while also being a source of periodic rebellions against the rulers of the majority of the Muslims, whom we refer to as "Sunnis." Today Sunnis comprise roughly 85% of the Muslims in the world, with most of the remaining 15% following various forms of Shi'ism. We will examine the origins of some of these in the forthcoming section of *The Ancient & Medieval World* that deals with the Umayyads and 'Abbasids.



Figure 2.13 The Shrine of 'Ali in Najaf, Iraq, photographed in 2003.

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The Hadith of Ghadir Khumm

NIALL CHRISTIE

Ahmad ibn ‘Ali al-Tabrisi, from *Al-Ihtijaj* (The Argumentation)

One of the Shi‘ite claims for the rightful leadership of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib is a hadith traditionally dated from shortly before the Prophet’s death in 632, which is said to record the last sermon given by the Prophet, given at Ghadir Khumm.¹ Shi‘ite interpreters claim that it indicates that Muhammad appointed ‘Ali to be his successor as the leader of the Muslim community, but Sunni interpreters dispute this. Much of the debate centres around the correct understanding of the Arabic words “mawla” and “wali,” which have several meanings including both “master” and “friend.” Needless to say, the text can be understood very differently depending on which meaning one accepts.

There are several versions of this sermon. The following extracts are drawn from al-Ihtijaj, a defense of Shi‘ism by an early 12th-century Shi‘ite scholar, Ahmad ibn ‘Ali al-Tabrisi. The translation has been edited for clarity.

The Hadith of Ghadir Khumm

Praise belongs to Allah Who is exalted above all the creation in His Oneness, and is near to His creation in His loneliness. Sublime is His authority, and great are the pillars of His names. His knowledge encompasses everything while He is lofty in status. He subdues all the creation through His power and evidence. He has always been praiseworthy and shall always be praised. [...] I testify that He is Allah, Whose holiness overspreads all ages, Whose light overwhelms perpetuity, Who enforces His command without consulting an advisor. There is no partner with Him in His planning, nor is there any discrepancy in His management. He shaped whatever He originated without a pre-existing model, and created whatever He created without getting assistance from anyone, burdening Himself, or having any need to find out a solution. He originated it in His will, thus it came into being, and He formed it in His intention, thus it became distinct. So, He is Allah, the One that there is no god but He, Who is proficient in skill, and beautiful in action. He is the just Who never oppresses, and the most generous to Whom all affairs are referred. [...] Nevertheless, Allah is not satisfied with me until I convey what He has sent down to me. Then, the Prophet recited again the following verse: “O Messenger! Deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord—with regard to ‘Ali²—and if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message at all, and Allah shall protect you from (evil) people.”

O people! Know that Allah has assigned ‘Ali as a guardian and a leader for you, whose obedience is obligatory for the immigrants, the helpers,³ and those who follow them in goodness, and for everyone,

1. Arabic: “The Pond of Khumm,” three miles from al-Juhfa, between Mecca and Medina.

2. “With regard to ‘Ali” is not in the standard text of this Qur’anic verse (5: 67).

3. I.e. The Muslims who immigrated from Mecca to Medina (the muhajirun), and the Muslim converts of Medina who helped them (the ansar).

whether nomad or city resident, Arab or non-Arab, free or slave, young or old, white or black, and for every monotheist. Ali's decree is to be carried out, his saying is sanctioned as law, and his command is effective. Cursed is whoever opposes him, blessed with mercy is whoever follows him, faithful is whoever acknowledges his (virtues and rights). Indeed, Allah has covered him and those who listen to him and obey him with mercy and forgiveness. O people! This is the last stand I make in this gathering; Thus, listen, obey, and submit to the command of your Lord, for Allah, the mighty and the majestic, is your *mawla*, then Muhammad, who is now addressing you, is your *mawla*. Then, after me, 'Ali is your *wali* and your *imam*⁴ by the command of Allah, your Lord. Then, leadership shall be in my **progeny**, within his offspring, until the Day you meet Allah and His Messenger. Nothing is lawful except what Allah declared so (in His book), and nothing is unlawful except Allah declared so in His book, for Allah, the mighty and the majestic, has informed me of the permissible and the forbidden things, and I have made known to 'Ali what my Lord has taught me of His Book, the permissible, and the forbidden things. O people! There is no knowledge except that Allah has kept its account in the heart of me, and I have recorded the details of all the knowledge that I was taught, in (the heart of) the leader of the pious, ('Ali). Certainly, there is no knowledge except that I have taught it to Ali, and he is the evident *imam*. O people! Do not stray from him, nor should you flee from him, nor should you refuse his guardianship and his authority, for he is the one who guides to truth and acts upon it, and crushes falsehood and **proscribes** it, accepting no blame, in the path of Allah, from any blamer. He is the first to believe in Allah and in His Messenger; and he is the one who offered his life as a sacrifice for the Messenger of Allah.⁵ He was with the Messenger of Allah when no one among men worshipped Allah in the company of His Messenger other than him. O people! Prefer him over all others, for Allah has indeed preferred him, and turn to him, for Allah has indeed appointed him as your guide. O people! He is an *imam* authorized by Allah, and Allah shall never turn to anyone in mercy who denies his authority, nor shall He ever forgive him; this is a decisive decree by Allah that He shall do so to anyone who opposes His command about him, and shall torment him with the most painful torment, which lasts forever and ever. Hence, beware lest you oppose him, and thus, arrive at a fire whose fuel is people and stones, prepared for the disbelievers. [...] O people! Reflect on the *Qur'an* and comprehend its verses. Look into its clear verses and do not follow its ambiguous parts, for by Allah, none shall be able to explain to you its warnings and its mysteries, nor shall anyone clarify its interpretation, other than the one that I have grasped his hand, brought up beside myself, the one about whom I inform you that whomever I am his *mawla*, this 'Ali is his *mawla*; and he is 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, my brother, the executor of my will, whose appointment as your guardian and leader has been sent down to me from Allah, the mighty and the majestic. O people! Verily, 'Ali and the pure ones among my offspring are the lesser weight, and the *Qur'an* is the greater weight. Each one informs about the other and agrees with it. They shall never part until they return to me at the Pool (of al-Kawthar in Paradise on the Day of Judgement). Behold! They are the trustees of Allah amongst His creation, and His people of wisdom on His earth. [...]

O Allah! You did send down, "This day, I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and was satisfied that Islam be your religion."⁶ You also said, "If anyone desires a religion other than

4. At the basic level, a prayer leader, but understood by Shi'ites to also mean the rightful spiritual leader of the Muslim community.
5. During the hijra, 'Ali took the Prophet's place in his bed to conceal Muhammad's departure from the Meccans, and was almost killed in the process.
6. *Qur'an* 5: 3.

Islam, never shall it be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter, he shall be one of the losers.”⁷ O Allah! I implore You to witness that I have conveyed Your message. O people! Allah, the mighty and the majestic, has indeed perfected your religion through ‘Ali’s leadership. Thus, whoever does not follow his example, and the example of those of my children from his loins, who will take his position until the Day of Judgement—when deeds are presented before Allah, the mighty and the majestic—they are the ones whose deeds become vain and fruitless, and they shall be in Hellfire forever. “Their torment shall not be lightened, nor shall it be postponed.”⁸ O people! This is ‘Ali, who has been my greatest aid, the most worthy of you before me, the closest in relation with me, and the dearest to me amongst you all.

Questions for Consideration

1. What rationales does the writer use to prove that ‘Ali should be the leader of the community after the Prophet?
2. In what ways does he aim to convince his listeners that they should accept this declaration?
3. What arguments might a supporter of one of the Sunni caliphs use to counter this argument?

7. *Qur’an* 3: 85.

8. *Qur’an* 3: 88.

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NIALL CHRISTIE

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HEALTH & MEDICINE: CHANGING VIEWS ON DISEASE

Section Author: Tracey J. Kinney, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Learning Objectives

- Identify varying responses to disease – its origins, causes, and impacts – in a number of different geographic locations
- Examine how attitudes towards disease changed over time and across geographic space during the medieval era
- Identify some of the impacts of successive outbreaks of disease during this period
- Analyze visual representations of disease during the medieval period



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/ancientandmedievalworld/?p=61#h5p-3>

Disease played a profound role in shaping societies throughout the medieval era. Reading contemporaneous responses to disease provides us with a unique window into medieval ways of thinking. Even though the documents in this section are all drawn from the early medieval era, they still cover a wide range of time and geographic space; yet, in each, the reader is able to discern key attitudes towards disease, its origins, and its impacts.

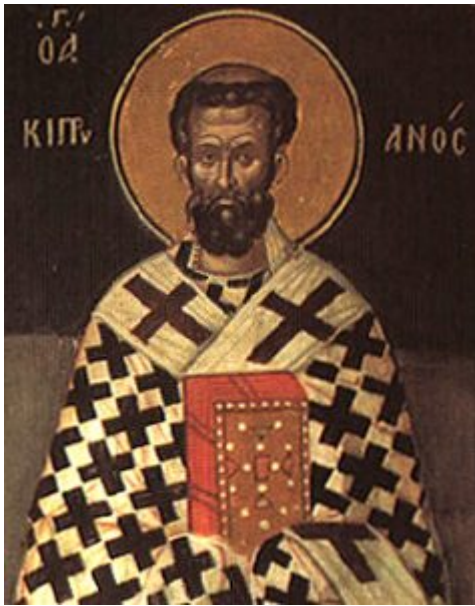


Figure 3.1 Representation of Bishop Cyprian of Carthage, after whom the 3rd-Century outbreak of disease was named.

Each of the outbreaks of disease presented in this chapter is referred to by its author as a 'plague'; however, the reader should be mindful that identifying the precise nature of any given outbreak in this period remains a difficult and contentious task. Most recently, epidemiologists have tended to argue that the 3rd-Century 'plague of Cyprian' was an outbreak of smallpox; yet others maintain it was hemorrhagic fever.¹ It seems more certain that 'Justinian's Plague' (c. 540) was the bubonic plague; in this case, contemporary epidemiology aligns with the detailed description of the disease and its symptoms found in the work of Procopius. The 'plague' that decimated England around 664 may have been smallpox, yellow fever, or the bubonic plague. The cause of the 2nd-Century Antonine Plague, depicted in Sweerts' painting "Plague in an Ancient City" was, for many years, misidentified as measles or typhus. Contemporary genetic analysis, however, points more strongly towards smallpox.²

Even as the biological causes of these outbreaks remain uncertain, their impacts can be assessed more fully. The pioneering environmental historian, William H. McNeill argued that the outbreak of bubonic plague that struck the Byzantine world during the reign of Justinian in the 540s was a key factor in the inability to reunite the eastern and western Roman empires.³ Subsequent authors have gone so far as to argue that it was this outbreak of disease that made possible the survival of what we would come to identify as a distinct medieval West.⁴

Watch: "[Placing the Plague of Justinian in the *Yersinia pestis* phylogenetic context.](#)" Jennifer Klunk, McMaster University: Ancient DNA Centre.

Media Attributions

- [Bishop Cyprian of Carthage](#) is licensed under a [Public Domain](#) license

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The Plague of Cyprian, c. 252

TRACEY J. KINNEY

The Crises of the Third Century

The so-called 'Plague of Cyprian', named for its best-known chronicler, Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, broke out around 249 CE amidst an already chaotic time in the Roman Empire. Throughout the third century the Roman Empire had been shaken by a series of internal and external crises. Successive military defeats created unrest within the Roman Army. Powerful commanders in the army raised a series of pretenders to the Imperial throne, often supporting whichever candidate promised the greatest rewards. Successive emperors debased the imperial currency in an effort to maintain power, until, at the local level, much of the Roman economy gave way to a barter system. High taxation generated popular unrest and in parts of Gaul and on the Iberian Peninsula, armed resistance movements rose up to resist the demands of the tax collectors. Meanwhile Rome's enemies continued to probe the borders of the Empire, placing a further strain on the Imperial treasury.

Cyprian, "On the Mortality"

1. ALTHOUGH in most of you, dearest brethren, there is a stedfast mind, firm faith, and soul devout, which wavers not before the **manifold** instances of this present mortality, and like a bold and rooted rock, under the swelling storms of this world, and the fierce floods of time, repels, not suffers from, their blow, and is but proved, not overcome by temptations; yet since I observe amongst your number some, who either through weakness of spirit, or poverty of faith, or the satisfactions of the life below, or tenderness of sex, or (what is a greater thing) through wandering from truth, do less strongly stand, and put not forth the divine unconquerable energy of their breast, there must be no dissembling or hiding of the matter, but so far as my poor powers extend, we must in the fulness of vigour and in words collected from the lessons of the Lord, extinguish the cowardice of a softened temper, so that he who has begun to be the servant of God and Christ, may before God and Christ be found walking worthy. For he, dearest brethren, who fights for God, who, stationed in the heavenly camp, breathes things divine, ought to own himself to be what he is, in order that we may not be trembling or faltering amid the storms and tempests of this world ; since the Lord foretold that these things would come; and with the instructive **exhortation** and doctrine of His warning voice, training and establishing the people of His Church, to all endurance of future things, hath prophesied and taught that wars and famines, and earthquakes and pestilences, would arise in every place. And lest any unprepared and sudden terror should disturb us at the access of adversity, He forewarned us that in the last times evil things should wax worse and worse. Lo, the things which were spoken are come to pass; and as those things are come to pass which were foretold, so those will follow which yet are promised; the Lord Himself giving assurance, and saying, When ye see all these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. [Luke 21].

2. Dearest brethren, the kingdom of God has begun to be nigh at hand; reward of life, and joy of eternal salvation, and perpetual happiness, and possession of Paradise lately lost, already, while the world passes away, are coming nigh; already heavenly things are succeeding to earthly, and great to small, and eternal to **transient**. What place is here, for anxiety and solicitude? Who amid these things is **tremulous** and mournful, except in whom hope and faith are wanting? It is for him to be afraid of death, who hath not willingness to come to Christ; and for him to be unwilling to come to Christ, who does not believe that he has begun to reign with Christ. For it is written that the just lives by faith. [Hab. 2] If thou art just, and livest by faith, if thou truly believest in God, why, as one who will be with Christ, and secure of the promise of the Lord, dost thou not embrace that call to Christ which is given thee, and for that thou art delivered from the devil, make thyself joyful in the deliverance? Symeon of a **surety**, that just man, who was truly just, who kept the commandments of God in fulness of faith; when it had been divinely told him, that he should not die before he had seen Christ, and the infant Christ had come with His Mother in the Temple, acknowledged in spirit that Christ was now born, concerning whom the prophecy had been made to him, and having seen whom, he knew that he was soon to die. Rejoicing therefore in the nearness now of death, and secure of being presently called away, he took the Child into his hands, and blessing God, cried out and said, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation [Luke 2]; proving surely and bearing testimony, that then for the servants of God is peace, then free, then tranquil rest, when, rescued from these turmoils of earth, we gain the port of rest and of eternal security ; when we put away this death, and come to immortality. ...

5. Some however there are, who are moved in thought, because the influences of this disease have made their attack on ourselves, as much as on the heathen ; as if the end of a Christian's faith was this, to enjoy in happiness the world and life, **unliable** to contact of evil; not as one, who, enduring here all adverse things, is reserved unto the future joy. It moves some, that this mortality should be common to us as to others. Yet what is there in this world, which is not common to us with others, so long as this common flesh is ours, according to the law of the first **nativity**? Even so long as here we are in the world, we are in equality of the flesh joined with the race of man, but in spirit separate. Where-fore, until this corruptible put on incorruption, and this mortal obtain immortality, and the Spirit guide us unto God the Father, whatsoever are the troubles of the flesh, are our common portion with the race of man. [1 Cor. 15] When therefore the earth **pines** in an unfruitful barrenness, famine makes no difference of one from another; when any city is occupied by a hostile assault, the capture lays its desolation equally upon all. And when the becalmed atmosphere suspends the rain, there is equal drought to all; and when the abrupt rocks dash a vessel in pieces, the voyagers suffer together an unexpected shipwreck. Disease of the eyes, attacks of fever, ailment of any of the limbs, is as common to us as to others, so long as the common flesh remains in this world upon us. Nay, if the Christian recognizes and masters on what condition, on what law he has become a believer, he will find, that he has more to endure in this world than other men, because he is to be struggling more with the assaults of the Devil. The divine Scripture teaches and forewarns us, saying, My son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in righteousness and fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation [Ecclus. 2]. And again: In pain endure, and in thy low estate have patience; for gold and silver is tried in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation [Ecclus. 2]. ...

10. Doubtless, let him fear to die, and only him, who, unborn of water and of the Spirit, is the property

of hell-fire; let him fear to die, who is without title in the Cross and passion of Christ ; let him fear to die, who is to pass from death here into the second death; let him fear to die, on whom at his going away from life, an eternal flame will lay pains that never cease; let him fear to die, on whom the longer delay **confers** this boon, that his tortures and groans will begin later. There are many among ourselves, who die in this **pestilence**; that is, there are many among us, who are at liberty from the life below. This pestilence, as to Jews and heathens and Christ's enemies it is a plague, so to the servants of God is it departure to their salvation. That without distinction between man and man, the just and the unjust die alike, think not, because of this, that the good and the wicked pass to the same end; the righteous are called to their refreshing, the unrighteous hurried into punishment; the faithful obtain a speedier deliverance, the unbelieving a speedier retribution. We are inconsiderate and ungrateful, dearest brethren, concerning the divine bounties, and account not of that which they bestow upon us. Behold, virgins depart peaceably and securely in their full honours, unfearing the threats and corruptions and polluted places of coming Anti-Christ; boys, escaped the peril of their unsafe years, happily arrive at the reward of continence and innocency; the delicate **matron** is no longer in dread of torture, obtaining ransom, by an early death, from fear of persecution, and from the hands and torments of the slaughterer. By the terrors of mortality and of the times, lukewarm men are heartened, the listless nerved, the sluggish awakened; deserters are compelled to return ; heathens brought to believe ; the **congregation** of established believers is called to rest; fresh and numerous champions are banded in heartier strength for the conflict, and having come into warfare in the season of death, will fight without fear of death, when the battle comes.

11. This further effect, dearest brethren, how suitable, how necessary is it; that this **pestilence** and plague, which appears full of terrors and gloom, is a trial of the righteousness of each, and puts the minds of mortal men into a balance; trying whether those that are in health tend them that are sick; whether relatives are dutifully affected towards their kindred; whether masters feel pitifully towards servants who are **languishing**; whether physicians keep from leaving the sick who **entreat** their aid; whether the passionate reduce their violence of temper; whether the **avaricious** can quench even by fear of death the insatiable heats of their feverish covetousness; whether the proud bend the neck; whether the **reprobate** remit their daring; whether, their dear ones being carried off, the rich even then do any wise dispense and give when they are to die without heirs. Were it that none other boon were brought by this mortality, herein greatly has it been of profit to Christians and the servants of God, that learning to be not afraid of death, we begin to look on martyrdom with desire. Trainings are these for us, not losses; they give to the mind the praise of courage, and by contempt of death prepare it for the crown.
12. But some one may here in opposition say, It is for this cause that I have sorrow in the present mortality, in that having made myself ready for confession, and having devoted myself to bear my passion with my whole heart and in fulness of virtue, I am robbed of my Martyrdom, being anticipated by death. But in the first place, Martyrdom is not in your control, but in the condescension of God; nor can you say that you have lost, what you know not that you merit to obtain. And, besides this, God the Searcher of reins and heart, beholder and inspector of hidden things, sees thee, and praises and approves; and He who perceives that the virtue was ready in you, will measure to your virtue its reward. Had Cain, when he brought the offering to God, already slain his brother? And yet God foreseeing already condemned the **fratricide** which he conceived in his heart. As in him the evil intention and

purpose of wickedness was anticipated by a foreseeing God, so also in the servants of God, in whom confession is intended, and Martyrdom conceived in mind, a will devoted to what is good is crowned by God the Judge. It is one thing for will to be wanting when Martyrdom is offered; another, in absence of the Martyrdom, for will to be present. As the Lord finds when He calls you, so also He judges of you; since Himself bears witness and says, And all the Churches shall know, that I am the Searcher of the reins and heart. For neither doth God require our bloodshedding, but our faith; since neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, were slain, yet merited they to be honoured first among the **Patriarchs**, for the merits of faith and righteousness; into whose feast is gathered whosoever is found faithful and righteous and **laudable**. ...

18. Furthermore, whereas the world hates the Christian, wherefore love that which hates thee? and not rather follow Christ, who both redeemed and loves thee? John in his Epistle cries out and says, warning us lest we be not made lovers of the world, while we indulge in carnal desires; Love not, says he, the world, neither the things that are in the world ; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him ; for all that is in the world is lust of the flesh, and lust of the eyes, and pride of life, which is not of the Father, but of the lust of the world; and the world will pass away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God **abideth** for ever, even as God abideth for ever [John 2]. Rather, dearest brethren, in fulness of spirit, firm faith, and hearty courage, let us be prepared unto all the will of God; shutting out our dread of death, and thinking of the deathless-ness which comes beyond it. Herein let us manifest that we live as we believe; on the one hand, by not lamenting the departure of them we love; and on the other, when the day of our own summons comes, by going without delay and with a ready mind, unto the Lord who calls us.
19. Ever as the servants of God ought thus to do, now ought they to do so much more, in a world which has begun to crumble, and is beset with storms of harassing calamity; for seeing ill things are begun, and since we know that worse are impending, we ought to account it our greatest gain, to take our departure hence the sooner. If the walls of your mansion were tottering with age, the roof shaking above you, and the **edifice**, wasted and wearied out, threatening an instant ruin of its time-**enfeebled** structure, would you not in all haste go forth from it? If, when you were on a voyage, a swelling and **troublous** tempest tossed up the waves in its strength, and **betokened** impending shipwreck, would you not hurry forward to the port? See a world tottering and going down; witnessing to its own dissolution, not merely in the old age of things, but in their conclusion; and thank you not God, are you not rejoiced, that, escaping by an earlier removal, you are rescued from overhanging ruins and shipwrecks and plagues?



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Questions for Consideration

1. How does Cyprian explain this outbreak of disease?
2. What can we determine about the purpose of this document?
3. What stands out in Cyprian's account of the spread of the disease and its effects?

The Plague of Justinian, c. 541-542

TRACEY J. KINNEY

Plague in the Eastern Roman Empire

Procopius of Caesarea (~490/507-c.560s) remains the best-known chronicler of the age of Justinian. His official works celebrated Justinian's many achievements, including his building projects and military campaigns. However, Procopius' *Anekdotia* (often translated as *Secret History*) was a scathing attack on the Emperor and the Empress Theodora. The account that follows is taken from his official *History of the Wars*, and details the spread of a deadly disease across the Eastern Roman Empire. Even before epidemiologists were able to confirm that the pathogen in question was *Yersinia pestis*, historians had concluded from Procopius' detailed descriptions that this was an outbreak of the bubonic plague. A recent economic analysis estimates the death toll between 25 and 50 million people, with densely populated areas such as Egypt, where the outbreak originated, losing up to 50% of their population.¹

Procopius, History of the Wars

XXII

During these times there was a **pestilence**, by which the whole human race came near to being annihilated. Now in the case of all other scourges sent from Heaven some explanation of a cause might be given by daring men, such as the many theories propounded by those who are clever in these matters; for they love to conjure up causes which are absolutely incomprehensible to man, and to fabricate outlandish theories of natural philosophy, knowing well that they are saying nothing sound, but considering it sufficient for them, if they completely deceive by their argument some of those whom they meet and persuade them to their view. But for this calamity it is quite impossible either to express in words or to conceive in thought any explanation, except indeed to refer it to God. For it did not come in a part of the world nor upon certain men, nor did it confine itself to any season of the year, so that from such circumstances it might be possible to find subtle explanations of a cause, but it embraced the entire world, and blighted the lives of all men, though differing from one another in the most marked degree, respecting neither sex nor age. For much as men differ with regard to places in which they live, or in the law of their daily life, or in natural bent, or in active pursuits, or in whatever else man differs from man, in the case of this disease alone the difference availed naught. And it attacked some in the summer season, others in the winter, and still others at the other times of the year. Now let each one express his own judgment concerning the matter, both **sophist** and astrologer, but as for me, I shall proceed to tell where this disease originated and the manner in which it destroyed men.

1. Guido Alfani and Tommy E. Murphy, "Plague and Lethal Epidemics in the Pre-Industrial World," *Journal of Economic History* 77, no. 1 (March 2017): 316.

It started from the Aegyptians who dwell in Pelusium. Then it divided and moved in one direction towards Alexandria and the rest of **Aegypt**, and in the other direction it came to Palestine on the borders of Aegypt; and from there it spread over the whole world, always moving forward and travelling at times favourable to it. For it seemed to move by fixed arrangement, and to **tarry** for a specified time in each country, casting its blight slightly upon none, but spreading in either direction right out to the ends of the world, as if fearing lest some corner of the earth might escape it. For it left neither island nor cave nor mountain ridge which had human inhabitants; and if it had passed by any land, either not affecting the men there or touching them in indifferent fashion, still at a later time it came back; then those who dwelt round about this land, whom formerly it had afflicted most sorely, it did not touch at all, but it did not remove from the place in question until it had given up its just and proper tale of dead, so as to correspond exactly to the number destroyed at the earlier time among those who dwelt round about. And this disease always took its start from the coast, and from there went up to the interior. And in the second year it reached Byzantium in the middle of spring, where it happened that I was staying at that time. And it came as follows. **Apparitions** of supernatural beings in human guise of every description were seen by many persons, and those who encountered them thought that they were struck by the man they had met in this or that part of the body, as it happened, and immediately upon seeing this apparition they were seized also by the disease.... But in the case of some the pestilence did not come on in this way, but they saw a vision in a dream and seemed to suffer the very same thing at the hands of the creature who stood over them, or else to hear a voice foretelling to them that they were written down in the number of those who were to die. But with the majority it came about that they were seized by the disease without becoming aware of what was coming either through a waking vision or a dream. And they were taken in the following manner. They had a sudden fever, some when just roused from sleep, others while walking about, and others while otherwise engaged, without any regard to what they were doing. And the body **shewed** no change from its previous colour, nor was it hot as might be expected when attacked by a fever, nor indeed did any inflammation set in, but the fever was of such a **languid** sort from its commencement and up till evening that neither to the sick themselves nor to a physician who touched them would it afford any suspicion of danger. It was natural, therefore, that not one of those who had contracted the disease expected to die from it. But on the same day in some cases, in others on the following day, and in the rest not many days later, a bubonic swelling developed; and this took place not only in the particular part of the body which is called "boubon," that is, below the abdomen, but also inside the armpit, and in some cases also beside the ears, and at different points on the thighs.

Up to this point, then, everything went in about the same way with all who had taken the disease. But from then on very marked differences developed; and I am unable to say whether the cause of this diversity of symptoms was to be found in the difference in bodies, or in the fact that it followed the wish of Him who brought the disease into the world. For there ensued with some a deep coma, with others a violent **delirium**, and in either case they suffered the characteristic symptoms of the disease. For those who were under the spell of the coma forgot all those who were familiar to them and seemed to be sleeping constantly. And if anyone cared for them, they would eat without waking, but some also were neglected, and these would die directly through lack of **sustenance**. But those who were seized with delirium suffered from insomnia and were victims of a distorted imagination; for they suspected that men were coming upon them to destroy them, and they would become excited and rush off in flight, crying out at the top of their voices. And those who were attending them were in a state of constant exhaustion and had a most difficult time of it throughout. For this reason everybody pitied them no less than the sufferers, not because they were threatened by the pestilence in going near it (for neither physicians nor other persons were found to contract this **malady** through contact with the sick or with the dead, for many who were constantly engaged

either in burying or in attending those in no way connected with them held out in the performance of this service beyond all expectation, while with many others the disease came on without warning and they died straightway); but they pitied them because of the great hardships which they were undergoing. For when the patients fell from their beds and lay rolling upon the floor, they, kept patting them back in place, and when they were struggling to rush headlong out of their houses, they would force them back by shoving and pulling against them. And when water chanced to be near, they wished to fall into it, not so much because of a desire for drink (for the most of them rushed into the sea), but the cause was to be found chiefly in the diseased state of their minds. They had also great difficulty in the matter of eating, for they could not easily take food. And many perished through lack of any man to care for them, for they were either overcome by hunger, or threw themselves down from a height. And in those cases where neither coma nor delirium came on, the bubonic swelling became mortified and the sufferer, no longer able to endure the pain, died. And one would suppose that in all cases the same thing would have been true, but since they were not at all in their senses, some were quite unable to feel the pain; for owing to the troubled condition of their minds they lost all sense of feeling.

Now some of the physicians who were at a loss because the symptoms were not understood, supposing that the disease centred in the bubonic swellings, decided to investigate the bodies of the dead. And upon opening some of the swellings, they found a strange sort of **carbuncle** that had grown inside them.

Death came in some cases immediately, in others after many days; and with some the body broke out with black **pustules** about as large as a **lentil** and these did not survive even one day, but all succumbed immediately. With many also a vomiting of blood ensued without visible cause and straightway brought death. Moreover I am able to declare this, that the most illustrious physicians predicted that many would die, who unexpectedly escaped entirely from suffering shortly afterwards, and that they declared that many would be saved, who were destined to be carried off almost immediately. So it was that in this disease there was no cause which came within the province of human reasoning; for in all cases the issue tended to be something unaccountable. For example, while some were helped by bathing, others were harmed in no less degree. And of those who received no care many died, but others, contrary to reason, were saved. And again, methods of treatment **shewed** different results with different patients. Indeed the whole matter may be stated thus, that no device was discovered by man to save himself, so that either by taking precautions he should not suffer, or that when the **malady** had assailed him he should get the better of it; but suffering came without warning and recovery was due to no external cause.

And in the case of women who were pregnant death could be certainly foreseen if they were taken with the disease. For some died through miscarriage, but others perished immediately at the time of birth with the infants they bore. However, they say that three women in confinement survived though their children perished, and that one woman died at the very time of child-birth but that the child was born and survived.

Now in those cases where the swelling rose to an unusual size and a discharge of pus had set in, it came about that they escaped from the disease and survived, for clearly the acute condition of the **carbuncle** had found relief in this direction, and this proved to be in general an indication of returning health; but in cases where the swelling preserved its former appearance there ensued those troubles which I have just mentioned. And with some of them it came about that the thigh was withered, in which case, though the swelling was there, it did not develop the least **suppuration**. With others who survived the tongue did not remain unaffected, and they lived on either **lisping** or speaking incoherently and with difficulty.

XXIII

Now the disease in Byzantium ran a course of four months, and its greatest **virulence** lasted about three. And at first the deaths were a little more than the normal, then the mortality rose still higher, and afterwards the tale of dead reached five thousand each day, and again it even came to ten thousand and still more than that. Now in the beginning each man attended to the burial of the dead of his own house, and these they threw even into the tombs of others, either escaping detection or using violence; but afterwards confusion and disorder everywhere became complete. For slaves remained **destitute** of masters, and men who in former times were very prosperous were deprived of the service of their **domestics** who were either sick or dead, and many houses became completely destitute of human inhabitants. For this reason it came about that some of the notable men of the city because of the universal destitution remained unburied for many days.



Figure 3.2 Justinian with Widow & Child, from the British Library Illuminated Manuscripts Collection.

And it fell to the lot of the emperor, as was natural, to make provision for the trouble. He therefore detailed soldiers from the palace and distributed money, commanding Theodorus to take charge of this work; this man held the position of announcer of imperial messages, always announcing to the emperor the petitions of his clients, and declaring to them in turn whatever his wish was. In the Latin tongue the Romans designate this office by the term “referendarius.” So those who had not as yet fallen into complete destitution in their domestic affairs attended individually to the burial of those connected with them. But Theodorus, by giving out the emperor’s money and by making further expenditures from his own purse, kept burying the bodies which were not cared for. And when it came about that all the tombs which had existed previously were filled with the dead, then they dug up all the places about the city one after the other, laid the dead there, each one as he could, and departed; but later on those who were making these trenches, no longer able to keep up with the number of the dying, mounted the towers of the

fortifications in Sycae, and tearing off the roofs threw the bodies in there in complete disorder; and they piled them up just as each one happened to fall, and filled practically all the towers with corpses, and then covered them again with their roofs. As a result of this an evil stench pervaded the city and distressed the inhabitants still more, and especially whenever the wind blew fresh from that quarter.

At that time all the customary rites of burial were overlooked. For the dead were not carried out escorted by a procession in the customary manner, nor were the usual chants sung over them, but it was sufficient if one carried on his shoulders the body of one of the dead to the parts of the city which bordered on the sea

and flung him down; and there the corpses would be thrown upon skiffs in a heap, to be conveyed wherever it might chance. At that time, too, those of the population who had formerly been members of the factions laid aside their mutual **enmity** and in common they attended to the burial rites of the dead, and they carried with their own hands the bodies of those who were no connections of theirs and buried them. Nay, more, those who in times past used to take delight in devoting themselves to pursuits both shameful and base, shook off the unrighteousness of their daily lives and practised the duties of religion with diligence, not so much because they had learned wisdom at last nor because they had become all of a sudden lovers of virtue, as it were—for when qualities have become fixed in men by nature or by the training of a long period of time, it is impossible for them to lay them aside thus lightly, except, indeed, some divine influence for good has breathed upon them—but then all, so to speak, being thoroughly terrified by the things which were happening, and supposing that they would die immediately, did, as was natural, learn respectability for a season by sheer necessity. Therefore as soon as they were rid of the disease and were saved, and already supposed that they were in security, since the curse had moved on to other peoples, then they turned sharply about and reverted once more to their baseness of heart, and now, more than before, they make a display of the inconsistency of their conduct, altogether surpassing themselves in villainy and in lawlessness of every sort. For one could insist emphatically without falsehood that this disease, whether by chance or by some **providence**, chose out with exactitude the worst men and let them go free. But these things were displayed to the world in later times.

During that time it seemed no easy thing to see any man in the streets of Byzantium, but all who had the good fortune to be in health were sitting in their houses, either attending the sick or mourning the dead. And if one did succeed in meeting a man going out, he was carrying one of the dead. And work of every description ceased, and all the trades were abandoned by the artisans, and all other work as well, such as each had in hand. Indeed in a city which was simply abounding in all good things starvation almost absolute was running riot. Certainly it seemed a difficult and very notable thing to have a sufficiency of bread or of anything else; so that with some of the sick it appeared that the end of life came about sooner than it should have come by reason of the lack of the necessities of life. And, to put all in a word, it was not possible to see a single man in Byzantium clad in the **chlamys**, and especially when the emperor became ill (for he too had a swelling of the groin), but in a city which held dominion over the whole Roman empire every man was wearing clothes befitting private station and remaining quietly at home. Such was the course of the pestilence in the Roman empire at large as well as in Byzantium. And it fell also upon the land of the Persians and visited all the other barbarians besides.



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Questions for Consideration

1. How does the author account for this outbreak of disease in the Eastern Roman Empire?
2. Does this differ from the explanations provided in the first account in this chapter? If so, how and why?
3. What does this account reveal about social and cultural values in the Byzantine capital?

Media Attributions

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The Plague of 664

TRACEY J. KINNEY

Disease in Medieval England

Written records from the early medieval period in England are almost non-existent. Historians have therefore relied heavily on Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* [*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*], written in the first half of the 8th Century, for information on this era. Bede's primary focus, however, was on the expansion of the Christian Church into pagan territories; therefore, the contemporary reader must bear this in mind when drawing conclusions based upon Bede's interpretation of events. The excerpts that follow begin in 664, with the first appearance of a "sudden pestilence" and conclude approximately four years later. Bede would have had access to oral testimony and to monastic records in constructing this part of his History.

Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

Chap. XXVII.

How Egbert, a holy man of the English nation, led a monastic life in Ireland. [664 a.d.]

In the same year of our Lord 664, there happened an eclipse of the sun, on the third day of May, about the tenth hour of the day. In the same year, a sudden pestilence depopulated first the southern parts of Britain, and afterwards attacking the province of the Northumbrians, ravaged the country far and near, and destroyed a great multitude of men. By this plague the **aforesaid** priest of the Lord, Tuda, was carried off, and was honourably buried in the monastery called Paegnalaech. Moreover, this plague prevailed no less disastrously in the island of Ireland. Many of the nobility, and of the lower ranks of the English nation, were there at that time, who, in the days of the Bishops Finan and Colman, forsaking their native island, retired thither, either for the sake of sacred studies, or of a more ascetic life; and some of them presently devoted themselves faithfully to a monastic life, others chose rather to apply themselves to study, going about from one master's cell to another. The Scots willingly received them all, and took care to supply them with daily food without cost, as also to furnish them with books for their studies, and teaching free of charge.

Among these were Ethelhun and Egbert, two youths of great capacity, of the English nobility. The former of whom was brother to Ethelwin, a man no less beloved by God, who also at a later time went over into Ireland to study, and having been well instructed, returned into his own country, and being made bishop in the province of Lindsey, long and nobly governed the Church. These two being in the monastery which in the language of the Scots is called Rathmelsigi, and having lost all their companions, who were either cut off by the plague, or dispersed into other places, were both seized by the same sickness, and grievously afflicted. Of these, Egbert, (as I was informed by a priest **venerable** for his age, and of great **veracity**, who declared he had

heard the story from his own lips,) concluding that he was at the point of death, went out of the chamber, where the sick lay, in the morning, and sitting alone in a fitting place, began seriously to reflect upon his past actions, and, being full of **compunction** at the remembrance of his sins, **bedewed** his face with tears, and prayed fervently to God that he might not die yet, before he could **forthwith** more fully make amends for the careless offences which he had committed in his boyhood and infancy, or might further exercise himself in good works. He also made a vow that he would spend all his life abroad and never return into the island of Britain, where he was born; that besides singing the psalms at the canonical hours, he would, unless prevented by bodily **infirmity**, repeat the whole Psalter daily to the praise of God; and that he would every week fast one whole day and night. Returning home, after his tears and prayers and vows, he found his companion asleep; and going to bed himself, he began to compose himself to rest. When he had lain quiet awhile, his comrade awaking, looked on him, and said, "Alas! Brother Egbert, what have you done? I was in hopes that we should have entered together into life everlasting; but know that your prayer is granted." For he had learned in a vision what the other had requested, and that he had obtained his request.

In brief, Ethelhun died the next night; but Egbert, throwing off his sickness, recovered and lived a long time after to grace the **episcopal** office, which he received, by deeds worthy of it; and blessed with many virtues, according to his desire, lately, in the year of our Lord 729, being ninety years of age, he departed to the heavenly kingdom. He passed his life in great perfection of humility, gentleness, continence, simplicity, and justice. Thus he was a great benefactor, both to his own people, and to those nations of the Scots and Picts among whom he lived in exile, by the example of his life, his earnestness in teaching, his authority in reproof, and his piety in giving away of those things which he received from the rich. ...

Chap. XXX.

How the East Saxons, during a pestilence, returned to idolatry, but were soon brought back from their error by the zeal of Bishop Jaruman. [665 a.d.]

At the same time, the Kings Sighere and Sebbi, though themselves subject to Wulfhere, king of the Mercians, governed the province of the East Saxons after Suidhelm, of whom we have spoken above. When that province was suffering from the aforesaid disastrous plague, Sighere, with his part of the people, **forsook** the mysteries of the Christian faith, and turned **apostate**. For the king himself, and many of the commons and nobles, loving this life, and not seeking after another, or even not believing in any other, began to restore the temples that had been abandoned, and to adore idols, as if they might by those means be protected against the plague. But Sebbi, his companion and co-heir in the kingdom, with all his people, very devoutly preserved the faith which he had received, and, as we shall show hereafter, ended his faithful life in great **felicity**.

King Wulfhere, hearing that the faith of the province was in part **profaned**, sent Bishop Jaruman, who was successor to Trumhere, to correct their error, and recall the province to the true faith. He acted with much discretion, as I was informed by a priest who bore him company in that journey, and had been his fellow labourer in the Word, for he was a religious and good man, and travelling through all the country, far and near, brought back both the people and the **aforesaid** king to the way of righteousness, so that, either **forsaking** or destroying the temples and altars which they had erected, they opened the churches, and gladly confessed

the Name of Christ, which they had opposed, choosing rather to die in the faith of resurrection in Him, than to live in the abominations of unbelief among their idols. Having thus accomplished their works, the priests and teachers returned home with joy.

Book IV

Chap. I.

How when Deusdedit died, Wighard was sent to Rome to receive the **episcopate**; but he dying there, Theodore was ordained archbishop, and sent into Britain with the Abbot Hadrian. [664-669 a.d.]

In the above-mentioned year of the aforesaid eclipse and of the pestilence which followed it immediately, in which also Bishop Colman, being overcome by the united effort of the Catholics, returned home, Deusdedit, the sixth bishop of the church of Canterbury, died on the 14th of July. Earconbert, also, king of Kent, departed this life the same month and day; leaving his kingdom to his son Egbert, who held it for nine years. The **see** then became vacant for no small time, until, the priest Wighard, a man of great learning in the teaching of the Church, of the English race, was sent to Rome by King Egbert and Oswy, king of the Northumbrians, as was briefly mentioned in the foregoing book, with a request that he might be ordained Archbishop of the Church of England; and at the same time presents were sent to the Apostolic pope, and many vessels of gold and silver. Arriving at Rome, where Vitalian presided at that time over the Apostolic **see**, and having made known to the aforesaid Apostolic pope the occasion of his journey, he was not long after carried off, with almost all his companions who had come with him, by a pestilence which fell upon them.

But the Apostolic pope having consulted about that matter, made diligent inquiry for some one to send to be archbishop of the English Churches. There was then in the monastery of Niridanum, which is not far from Naples in Campania, an abbot called Hadrian, by nation an African, well versed in Holy Scripture, trained in monastic and **ecclesiastical** teaching, and excellently skilled both in the Greek and Latin tongues. The pope, sending for him, commanded him to accept the **bishopric** and go to Britain. He answered, that he was unworthy of so great a dignity, but said that he could name another, whose learning and age were **fitter** for the episcopal office. He proposed to the pope a certain monk named Andrew, belonging to a neighbouring **nunnery** and he was by all that knew him judged worthy of a bishopric; but the weight of bodily **infirmity** prevented him from becoming a bishop. Then again Hadrian was urged to accept the episcopate; but he desired a **respite**, to see whether in time he could find another to be ordained bishop.

There was at that time in Rome, a monk, called Theodore, known to Hadrian, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, a man instructed in secular and Divine writings, as also in Greek and Latin; of high character and venerable age, being sixty-six years old. Hadrian proposed him to the pope to be ordained bishop, and prevailed; but upon the condition that he should himself conduct him into Britain, because he had already travelled through **Gaul** twice upon different occasions, and was, therefore, better acquainted with the way, and was, moreover, sufficiently provided with men of his own; as also, to the end that, being his fellow labourer in teaching, he might take special care that Theodore should not, according to the custom of the Greeks, introduce any thing contrary to the truth of the faith into the Church where he presided. Theodore, being ordained subdeacon,

waited four months for his hair to grow, that it might be **shorn** into the shape of a crown; for he had before the **tonsure** of St. Paul, the Apostle, after the manner of the eastern people. He was ordained by Pope Vitalian, in the year of our Lord 668, on Sunday, the 26th of March, and on the 27th of May was sent with Hadrian to Britain.

They proceeded together by sea to Marseilles, and thence by land to Arles, and having there delivered to John, archbishop of that city, Pope Vitalian's letters of recommendation, were by him detained till Ebroin, the king's mayor of the palace, gave them leave to go where they pleased. Having received the same, Theodore went to Agilbert, bishop of Paris, of whom we have spoken above, and was by him kindly received, and long entertained. But Hadrian went first to Emme, Bishop of the Senones, and then to Faro, bishop of the Meldi, and lived in comfort with them a considerable time; for the approach of winter had obliged them to rest wherever they could. King Egbert, being informed by sure messengers that the bishop they had asked of the Roman prelate was in the kingdom of the Franks, sent thither his **reeve**, Raedfrid, to conduct him. He, having arrived there, with Ebroin's leave took Theodore and conveyed him to the port called Quentavic; where, falling sick, he stayed some time, and as soon as he began to recover, sailed over into Britain. But Ebroin detained Hadrian, suspecting that he went on some mission from the Emperor to the kings of Britain, to the prejudice of the kingdom of which he at that time had the chief charge; however, when he found that in truth he had never had any such commission, he discharged him, and permitted him to follow Theodore. As soon as he came to him, Theodore gave him the monastery of the blessed Peter the Apostle, where the archbishops of Canterbury are wont to be buried, as I have said before; for at his departure, the Apostolic lord had **enjoined** upon Theodore that he should provide for him in his province, and give him a suitable place to live in with his followers.

Questions for Consideration

1. How does the author account for this particular outbreak of disease?
2. Does this differ from the previous two accounts? How and why?
3. What can we conclude about the world in which Bede lived by reading this account of the plague era?

Plague in an Ancient City

TRACEY J. KINNEY

The Classical World as Viewed from the 17th Century

It is believed that the Flemish painter Michael Sweerts lived through an outbreak of the plague while residing in Rome in the 1640s. His subsequent painting, "Plague in an Ancient City", can therefore be seen to represent both contemporary concerns and historical themes. Art historians disagree as to whether or not the painting depicts a specific outbreak of the plague in the classical world, since many of Sweerts' works are allegorical in nature. It is likely that this work too is as much a reflection on social and cultural values, as it is an attempt to capture accurately a specific moment in time.



Figure 3.3 Michael Sweerts, *Plague in an Ancient City*, 1652. Oil on canvas. 46 3/4 × 67 1/4 in. (118.75 × 170.8 cm). Click anywhere on the image to open a larger version.

Questions for Consideration

1. What does this painting tell us about the perception of plague during the 17th century? What of the perception of Ancient Rome?
2. Does this painting concur with accounts of disease discussed earlier in this chapter, or does it challenge them?

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The Antonine Plague

TRACEY J. KINNEY

Looking Back from the 19th Century

Jules Elie Delauney (1828-1891) is recognized as one of the foremost French neoclassical painters of the 19th Century. Delauney, who studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, depicts mythological and historical themes, often in combination. “La Peste à Rome”, featured here, includes an equestrian statue that is believed to be Marcus Aurelius; however, the plinth reads “Constantine”. The statue on the right-hand side of the painting is Aesculapius, the Roman god of medicine. Delauney is said to have been inspired by a passage from the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea* (Golden Legend, ~1292), which reads, “And then there appeared a good angel, who commanded a bad angel, armed with a pike, to strike the houses and each house had as many dead as the number of blows on the door.” The work is currently on display at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. The exhibit notes observe that this was one of the most acclaimed works at the 1869 Salon, where it was first exhibited.



Figure 3.4 Delaunay, *La Peste à Rome*, 1869. Oil on canvas H. 131; W. 176.5 cm. Click anywhere on the image for a larger version

Questions for Consideration

1. How does the depiction of plague compare to that of the previous painting?
2. Do contemporary (that is, 19th Century) concerns influence Delauney's painting in any way?
3. Why would the author include the 'Constantine plinth'?

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Sources & Suggestions for Further Research

TRACEY J. KINNEY

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HEALTH & MEDICINE: THE BLACK DEATH

Section Author: Adrianna Bakos, University of the Fraser Valley

Learning Objectives

- Describe the symptoms, modes of transmission, and impact of the disease on Europe
- Evaluate the varied individual and communal responses to the epidemic
- Articulate some of the short- and long-term consequences of the Black Death
- Summarize historiographical debates about the nature of the Black Death

The Black Death stalked Europe pitilessly between 1347 and 1353. The epidemic took a devastating toll; historians estimate that between 30 and 60 percent of the European population died in that six-year window. In some cases, whole communities were extinguished in a matter of months. Arguably the emotional toll was even greater than the demographic one. In the introduction to his *Decameron*, Florentine author Giovanni Boccaccio lamented, “for their terror was such, that a brother even fled from his brother, a wife from her husband, and (what is more uncommon) a parent from its own child.” The bonds of family and fellowship could not withstand the corrosive effect of the contagion. No wonder then that more than one observer expressed communal existential dread – would humanity survive this last, greatest punishment from a disappointed God?

The epidemic of the mid-14th century was not called the Black Death by contemporaries on account of the black, necrotizing flesh of the victims. Rather, this was a term later chroniclers applied to it to capture the depth of crisis and despair into which Europe had fallen at that time. People living through the trauma generally called it the Great Mortality or *La peste*. Part of the horror for contemporaries was not knowing where the disease came from or how it was transmitted.



Figure 4.1 A plague pit in Lyon, France containing numerous victims of the Black Death

Much modern scholarship has been devoted to the determination of which pathogen caused this devastating epidemic. It was during the course of the third (and last) significant outbreak of plague at the end of the 19th century, that French physician and bacteriologist Alexandre Yersin identified the specific pathogen which causes plague; in recognition of his discovery, the bacterium was later named *Yersinia pestis*. For many years there was no scholarly consensus that the bacterium Yersin discovered was,

in fact, responsible for the epidemic in the 14th century. In large measure this was due to the fact that there is no contemporary evidence of rats and other small animals dying off in large numbers, which is assumed by historical epidemiologists to be a necessary precondition for the transfer of fleas (the primary disease vector) to human hosts. Over the years other diseases such as anthrax and ebola have been bruited as the possible cause,

but advancements in DNA technology in the last two decades have allowed researchers to extract material from corpses dumped in plague pits across Europe, all of which points to a definitive determination that *Yersinia pestis* is the culprit. Recent research has demonstrated through computer modelling that human to human transmission, via human lice and fleas, was a more likely transmission route, explaining the lack of an accompanying rat die-off.¹

There is general consensus that the disease originated in the Gobi desert region, where the plague bacterium is found enzootically² within resident rodent populations. Historians speculate that at some point early in the 14th century, a climatic shift or some other ecological event drove small animal populations out of the desert and into contact with rodents living in closer contact with humans. The disease then travelled in tandem with trading caravans on the Silk Road; some of the first evidence of mortality associated with the outbreak can be found on gravestones in Issyk Kul (in modern day Kyrgystan), dating from the 1330s. Sometime in 1346, the disease arrived in Caffa, a trading port on the shores of the Black Sea controlled by the Italian city-state of Genoa. At that time, the Genoese were engaged in conflict with the Golden Horde. Ever since, an apocryphal story has circulated that the disease entered the fortified city by means of corpses catapulted over the walls by the besieging and infected army.³ By whatever means the infection entered Caffa, from thence it was carried by boat to a number of ports in the Mediterranean, including Marseilles, Venice and Split. Over the course of the next four years, the plague would travel in a roughly clockwise direction across Europe, generally following well-established trade routes. Very few communities were spared the devastating visitation, although a few fortunate towns such as Milan and Liège were inexplicably immune.

Listen to the [Black Death from the BBC program “In Our Time,”](#) for more information

Questions for Consideration

1. Was the Black Death a “turning point” in European history? Is this the event which separates the medieval from the modern worlds?
2. Have historians overemphasized the short- and long-term impact of the epidemic?
3. What do the coping strategies of individuals and communities reveal about the mental world of

1. Katharine R. Dean, Fabienne Krauer, Lars Walløe, Ole Christian Lingjærde, Barbara Bramanti, Nils Chr. Stenseth, Boris V. Schmid, “Human Ectoparasites and the Spread of Plague in Europe during the Second Pandemic,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 6 (February 2018): 1304-09.
2. The terms “enzootic” and “endemic” refer to diseases which regularly recur and/or exist in balanced state within animal and human populations, respectively. “Epizootic” and “epidemic” diseases are those which break out intermittently and with virulence.
3. While many have dismissed the notion the Genoese in Caffa were infected via what has been characterized as the known example of biological warfare, in recent years, the story has been endorsed by the Centers for Disease Control. See Mark Wheelis, “Biological Warfare at the 1346 Siege of Caffa,” *Historical Review* 8, no. 9 (2002): 971-75.

Europeans in the 14th century?

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Responses to the Plague

ADRIANNA BAKOS

The Municipal Ordinances of Pistoia (1348)

In the name of Christ Amen. Herein are written certain ordinances and provisions made and agreed upon by certain wise men of the People of the city of Pistoia elected and commissioned by the lords Anziani and the Standardbearer of Justice of the said city concerning the preserving, strengthening and protecting the health of humans from various and diverse pestilences which otherwise can befall the human body. And written by me Simone Buonacorsi notary. . . in the year from the Nativity of the Lord MCCCXLVIII, the first Indiction.

First. So that no contaminated matter which presently persists in the areas surrounding the city of Pistoia can enter into the bodies of the citizens of Pistoia, these wise men provided and ordered that no citizen of Pistoia or dweller in the district or the county of Pistoia . . . shall in any way dare or presume to go to Pisa or Lucca or to the county or district of either. And that no one can or ought to come from either of them or their districts ... to the said city of Pistoia or its district or county on penalty of £ 50 ... And that gatekeeper of the city of Pistoia guarding the gates of the said city shall not permit those coming or returning to the said city of Pistoia from the said cities of Pisa or Lucca, their districts or counties to enter the said gates on penalty of £ 10 ... It is licit, however, for citizens now living in Pistoia to go to Pisa and Lucca, their districts and counties and then return if they have first obtained a license from the Council of the People

II. Item. The foresaid wise men provided and ordered that no person whether citizen, inhabitant of the district or county of the city of Pistoia or foreigner shall dare or presume in any way to bring ... to the city of Pistoia, its district or county, any used cloth, either linen or woolen, for use as clothing for men or women or for bedclothes on penalty of £ 200. ... Citizens of Pistoia, its district and county returning to the city, district or county will be allowed to bring with them the linen or woolen cloths they are wearing and those for personal use carried in luggage or a small bundle weighing 30 pounds or less. ... And if any quantity of cloth of the said type or quality has been carried into the said city, county or district, the carrier shall be held to and must remove and export it from the said city, county and district within three days of the adoption of the present ordinance under the foresaid penalty for each carrier or carriers and for each violation.

III. Item. They provided and ordered that the bodies of the dead, after they had died, can not be nor ought to be removed from the place in which they are found unless first such a body has been placed in a wooden casket covered by a lid secured with nails, so that no stench can issue forth from it; nor can it be covered except by a canopy, blanket or drape under a penalty for £ 50 of pennies paid by the heirs of the dead person.... And also that likewise such dead bodies of the dead must be carried to the grave only in the said casket under the said penalty as has been said. And so that the foresaid shall be noted by the rectors and officials of the city of Pistoia, present and future rectors of the parishes of the city of Pistoia in whose parish there is any dead person are held to and must themselves announce the death and the district [of the city] in which the dead person lived to the podesta and captain or others of the government of the said city. And they must notify them of the name of the dead person and of the district in which the dead person

had lived or pay the said penalty for each contravention. And the podesta and captain to whom such an announcement or notification has been made, immediately are held to and must send one of their officials to the same location to see and inquire if the contents of the present article and other statutes and ordinances concerning funerals are being observed and to punish anyone found culpable according to the said penalty.... And the foresaid shall not be enforced nor is it extended to poor and miserable persons who are declared to be poor and miserable according to the form of any statutes or ordinances of the said city.

IV. Item. In order to avoid the foul stench which the bodies of the dead give off they have provided and ordered that any ditch in which a dead body is to be buried must be dug under ground to a depth of 2 1/2 braccia by the measure of the city of Pistoia.

V. Item. They have provided and ordered that no person of whatever condition or status or authority shall dare or presume to return or to carry to the city of Pistoia any dead body in or out of a casket or in any manner on penalty of £ 25 of pennies paid by whoever carries, brings, or orders [a body] to be carried or brought for each occasion. And that the gatekeepers of the said city shall not permit such a body to be sent into the said city on penalty of the foresaid fine by each gatekeeper at the gate through which the said body was sent.

VI. Item. They have provided and ordered that any person who will have come for the burial or to bury any dead person can not and may not be in the presence of the body itself nor with the relatives of such a dead person except for the procession to the church where it will be buried. Nor shall such persons return to the house where the defunct person lived or enter into that house or any other house on the said occasion on penalty of £ 10.

VII. Item. They have provided and ordered that when anyone has died no person should dare or presume to present or to send any gift before or after burial to the former dwelling place of such a dead person or any other place on the said occasion or to attend or to go to a meal in that house or place on the said occasion on penalty of £ 25.... Children, carnal brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews of such a dead person and their children, however, shall be expected [from this provision].

VIII. Item. They have provided and ordered that in order to avoid useless or fruitless expenses no person should dare or presume to dress in new clothing during the period of mourning for any dead person or during the eight days after that, on penalty of £ 25 of pennies for whoever contravenes [this] and for each time. Wives of such dead persons however, shall be exempted; they can be dressed in whatever new clothing they wish without penalty.

IX. Item. They have provided and ordered that no paid mourner... shall dare or presume to mourn publicly or privately or to invite other citizens of Pistoia to go to the funeral or to the dead person; nor may anyone engage the foresaid mourner, hornplayer, cryer or drummer.

X. Item. So that the sounds of bells might not depress the infirm nor fear arise in them [the Wise Men] have provided and ordered that the bellringers or custodians in charge of the belltower of the cathedral of Pistoia shall not permit any bell in the said campanile to be rung for the funeral of the dead nor shall any person dare or presume to ring any of these bells on the said occasion.... At the chapel or parish church of the said dead person or at the friary if the person is to be buried at a church of the friars, they can ring the bell of the chapel, parish church or the church of the friars so long as it is rung only one time and moderately, on the foresaid penalty in the foresaid manner [for each violation]

XI. Item. They have provided and ordered that no one shall dare or presume to gather or cause to gather any persons for the purpose of bringing any widow from the former habitation of a dead person, unless at

the time she is being returned from the church or cemetery where such a dead person was buried. [Blood relatives] of such a widow, however, wishing to bring the widow from the house at times other than at the time of burial may send up to four women to accompany the said woman, who is to be brought from the foresaid house of the dead person....

XII. Item. They have provided and ordered that no person should dare or presume to raise or cause to be raised any wailing or clamor over any person or because of any person who has died outside the city, district or county of Pistoia; nor on the said occasion should any persons be brought together in any place except blood relatives and associates of such a dead person, nor on the said occasion should any bell be rung or caused to be wrung, nor announcements be made through the city of Pistoia by mourners, nor on the said occasion should any invitation [to join the mourners] be made on a penalty of £ 25.... It must be understood, however, in any written ordinances speaking of the dead and of honoring the burial of the dead that the foresaid shall not have force in the burial of the body of any soldiers of the militia, doctors of laws, judges or physicians whose bodies, because of their dignity, may be honored licitly at burial in a manner pleasing to their heirs.

XIV. Item. They have provided and ordered that butchers and retail vendors of meat, individually and in common, can not, nor ought to hold or maintain near a tavern or other place where they sell meats, or near a shop or beside or behind a shop any stable, pen or any other thing which will give off a putrid smell; nor can they slaughter meat animals nor hang them after slaughter in any stable or other place in which there is any stench on a penalty of £ 10.

XXII. Item. So that stench and putrefaction shall not be harmful to men, henceforth tanning of hides can not and must not be done within the walls of the city of Pistoia on penalty of £ 25....

XXIII. Item. For the observance of each and every provision contained in the present articles and everything in the article speaking of funerals of the dead, of butchers and retail vendors of meats, they provided and ordered that the lord podest^ and captain and their officials charged pro tem with the foresaid [duties] shall and must proceed against, investigate, and inquire. . . concerning acts contrary to the foresaid [ordinances], and cause whatever of the foresaid ordained to be reviewed as often as possible, and punish the guilty by the foresaid fines. . . . Also any person may accuse or denounce before either the said podest^ or captain any persons acting against the foresaid or any of the foresaid or the content of the said statutes or ordinances. And such denunciations or accusers shall, can and may have one fourth of the fine after it is levied and paid, which fourth part the treasurer pro tem of the treasury of the said city shall be held to and have to pay and give to the said accuser and informer as soon as the fine and penalty have been paid. And sufficient proof shall be offered by one witness worthy of belief, or four persons of good reputation who have learned [of the contravention]. . . .

Marchionne di Coppo di Stefano Buonaiuti, *Florentine Chronicle*.

At every church, or at most of them, pits were dug, down to the water-table, as wide and deep as the parish was populous; and therein, whosoever was not very rich, having died during the night, would be shouldered by those whose duty it was, and would either be thrown into this pit, or they would pay big money for somebody else to do it for them. The next morning there would be very many in the pit. Earth would be taken and thrown down on them; and then others would come on top of them, and then earth on top again, in layers, with very little earth, like garnishing lasagne with cheese.

The gravediggers who carried out these functions were so handsomely paid that many became rich and many died, some already rich and others having earned little, despite the high fees. The female and male sick-bay attendants demanded from one to three florins a day, plus sumptuous expenses. The foodstuffs suitable for the sick, cakes and sugar, reached outrageous prices. A pound of sugar was sold at between three and eight florins, and the same went for other confectionery. Chickens and other poultry were unbelievably expensive, and eggs were between 12 and 24 denari each: you were lucky to find three in a day, even searching through the whole city. Wax was unbelievable: a pound of wax rose to more than a florin, nevertheless an age-old arrogance of the Florentines was curbed, in that an order was given not to parade more than two large candles. The churches only had one bier apiece, as was the custom, and this was insufficient. Pharmacists and grave-diggers had obtained biers, hangings and laying-out pillows at great price. The shroud-cloth apparel which used to cost, for a woman, in terms of petticoat, outer garment, cloak and veils, three florins, rose in price to thirty florins, and would have risen to one hundred florins, except that they stopped using shroud-cloth, and whoever was rich was dressed with plain cloth, and those who weren't rich were sewn up in a sheet. The benches placed for the dead cost a ludicrous amount, and there weren't enough of them even if there had been a hundred times more. The priests couldn't get enough of ringing the bells: so an order was passed, what with the panic caused by the bells ringing and the sale of benches and the curbing of spending, that nobody should be allowed the death-knell, nor should benches be placed, nor should there be a public announcement by the crier, because the sick could hear them, and the healthy took fright as well as the sick. The priests and friars thronged to the rich, and were paid such great sums that they all enriched themselves. And so an ordinance was passed that only one rule (of religious houses) and the local church could be had, and from that rule a maximum of six friars. All harmful fruit, such as unripe plums, unripe almonds, fresh beans, figs and all other inessential unhealthy fruit, was forbidden from entering the city. Many processions and relics and the painting of Santa Maria Impruneta were paraded around the city, to cries of 'Mercy', and with prayers, coming to a halt at the rostrum of the Priori. There peace was made settling great disputes and questions of woundings and killings. Such was the panic this plague provoked that people met for meals as a brigata to cheer themselves up; one person would offer a dinner to ten friends, and the next evening it would be the turn of one of the others to offer the dinner, and sometimes they thought they were going to dine with him, and he had no dinner ready, because he was ill, and sometimes the dinner had been prepared for ten and two or three less turned up. Some fled to the country, and some to provincial towns, to get a change of air; where there was no plague they brought it, and where it already existed they added to it. No industry was busy in Florence; all the workshops were locked up, all the inns were closed, only chemists and churches were open. Wherever you went, you could find almost nobody; many rich good men were borne from their house to church in their coffin with just four undertakers and a lowly cleric carrying the cross, and

even then they demanded a florin apiece. Those who especially profited from the plague were the chemists, the doctors, the poulterers, the undertakers, and the women who sold mallow, nettles, mercury plant and other poultice herbs for drawing abscesses. And those who made the most were these herb sellers. Woollen merchants and retailers when they came across cloth could sell it for whatever price they asked. Once the plague had finished, anybody who could get hold of whatsoever kind of cloth, or found the raw materials to make it, became rich; but many ended up moth-eaten, spoilt and useless for the looms, and thread and raw wool lost in the city and the contado. This plague began in March as has been said, and finished in September 1348. And people began to return to their homes and belongings. And such was the number of houses full of goods that had no owner, that it was amazing. Then the heirs to this wealth began to turn up. And someone who had previously had nothing suddenly found himself rich, and couldn't believe it was all his, and even felt himself it wasn't quite right. And both men and women began to show off with clothes and horses."

A Procession of Flagellants, *Chronicle of Aegidius Li Muisis*



Figure 4.2 A medieval depiction of a parade of flagellants passing through the hamlet of Doornik (present-day Netherlands)

In the aforesaid year it came to pass that on the day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (Aug. 15) some 200 persons came here from Bruges about [noon. These remained assembled on the market-place, and immediately the whole town was

filled with curiosity as to why these folk had come. The burgesses came in small bodies to the market-place when they heard the news in order to convince them of the fact by their own eyes. Meantime the folk from Bruges prepared to perform their ceremonies which they called "penance". The inhabitants of both sexes, who had never before seen any such thing], began to imitate the actions of the strangers, to torment themselves also by the penitential exercises and to thank God for this means of penance which seemed to them most effectual. [And the people from Bruges remained in the town the whole of that day and night.]

Clement VI, *Quamvis Perfidiam* (1348)

Even though we justly detest the perfidy of the Jews, who, persisting in their stubbornness, refuse to interpret correctly the sayings of the prophets and the secret words of their own writings and take notice of Christian faith and salvation, we nevertheless are mindful of our duty to shelter the Jews, by reason of the fact that our Savior, when assumed mortal flesh for the salvation of the human race, deemed it worthy to be born of Jewish stock, and for the sake of humanity in that the Jews have called upon the assistance of our protection and the clemency of Christian piety. . . . Recently, however, it has come to our attention by public fame, or rather infamy, that some Christians out of rashness have impiously slain several of the Jews, without respect to age or sex, after falsely blaming the pestilence on poisonings by Jews, said to be in league with the devil, when in fact it is the result of an angry God striking at the Christian people for their sins. And it is the assertion of many that some of these Christians are chasing after their own profit and are blinded by greed in getting rid of the Jews, because they owe great sums of money to them. And we have heard that although the Jews are prepared to submit to judgment before a competent judge concerning this preposterous crime, nevertheless this is not enough to stem Christian violence, but rather their fury rages even more. As long as their error is not corrected, it seems to be approved. And although we would wish that the Jews be suitably and severely punished should perchance they be guilty of or accessories to such an outrageous crime, for which any penalty that could be devised would barely be sufficient, nevertheless it does not seem credible that the Jews on this occasion are responsible for the crime nor that they caused it, because this nearly universal pestilence, in accordance with God's hidden judgment, has afflicted and continues to afflict the Jews themselves, as well as many other races who had never been known to live alongside them, throughout the various regions of the world. We order all of you by apostolic writing, and each of you in particular who will be asked to do so, to warn your subjects, both the clergy and the people, during the service of the mass in your churches, and to expressly enjoin them on pain of excommunication, which you may then inflict on those who transgress, that they are not to presume to seize, strike, wound, or kill Jews, no matter what the occasion or by what authority (more likely their own rashness), or to demand of them forced labor. But we do not by these presents deprive anyone of the power to proceed justly against the Jews, which they may do concerning this or any other excesses committed by them, provided that they have grounds for proceeding against them, either in this or any other business, and that they do so before competent judges and follow judicial procedure.

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Symptoms and Treatment

ADRIANNA BAKOS

Boccaccio, *The Decameron*

In the year then of our Lord 1348, there happened at Florence (the finest city in all Italy) a most terrible plague; which (whether owing to the influence of the planet, or that it was sent from God as a just punishment for our sines) had broke out some years before in the Levant, and after passing from place to place and making incredible havoc all the way, had now reached the West...began to show itself in a sad and wonderful manner; and, different to what it had been in the East (where bleeding from the nose was the fatal prognostic) here there appeared certain tumours in the groin, or under the armpits, some as big as a small apple, others as an egg; and afterwards purple spots in most parts of the body; and in some cases large and but few in number, in others less and more numerous, both sorts the usual messengers of death. To the cure of this malady neither medical knowledge, nor the power of drugs were of any effect; whether because the disease was in its own nature mortal, mor that the physicians (the number of whom taking quacks and women pretenders into the account, was grown very great) could form no just idea of the cause, nor consequently ground a true method of cure; which ever was the reason, few or none escaped; but they generally died the third day from the first appearance of the symptoms, without a fever or other bad circumstance attending. And the disease by being communicated from the sick to the well, seemed daily to get ahead, and to rage the more, as fire will do, by laying on fresh combustibles. Nor was it given by conversion with only, or coming near the sick, but even by touching their clothes, or any thing that they had before touched....Such, I say was the quality of the pestilential matter, as to pass not only from man to man, but what is more strange, and has been often known, that any thing belonging to the infected, if touched by any other creature, would certainly infect, and even kill that creature in a short space of time: And one instance of this kind, I took particular notice of; namely, that the rags of a poor man just dead, being thrown into the street, and two hogs coming by at the same time, and rooting amongst them, and shaking them about in their mouths, in less than an hour turned around and died on the spot.

Guy de Chauliac, *Chirurgia Magna*

Therefore the said mortality began for us [in Avignon] in the month of January [1348], and lasted seven months. And it took two forms: the first lasted two months, accompanied by continuous fever and a spitting up of blood, and one died within three days. The second lasted the rest of the time, also accompanied

by continuous fever and by apostemes [tumors] and antraci [carbuncles] on the external parts, principally under the armpits and in the groin, and one died within five days. And the mortality was so contagious, especially in those who were spitting up blood, that not only did one get it from another by living together, but also by looking at each other, to the point that people died without servants and were buried without priests.... For a cure, there are phlebotomies and purgatives [probably vomit inducing substances or laxatives] and electuaries and syrupy cordials. And the external apostemes were ripened with figs and onions that were cooked and ground up and mixed with leavened bread dough and butter. Afterwards the apostemes would open and they were healed with a treatment for ulcers. The antraci [carbuncles] were ventosed [i.e., a cupping-glass applied], scarified [i.e., cut open], and cauterized. And I, in order to avoid a bad reputation, did not dare depart [from Avignon], but with a continuous fear I preserved myself as best I could with the aforesaid remedies. Nonetheless, toward the end of the mortality, I fell into a continuous fever, with an aposteme on the groin, and I was sick for nearly six weeks. And I was in such great danger that all of my friends believed that I would die. And the aposteme ripened and healed, as I have described above, [and] I escaped by God's command.

Sources & Suggestions for Further Research

ADRIANNA BAKOS

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PEOPLES: THE EARLY CAROLINGIANS

Section Author: Barrie Brill, Langara College, Retired

Learning Objectives

- Explain the factors that led to the rise of the Carolingian dynasty
- Reveal the significance of the role of Pippin II of Herstal in establishing the basis of Pippinid power
- Identify the basis of Charles Martel's power and examine his role in suppressing neighbouring principalities
- Evaluate the overall significance of Charles Martel
- Explain the role of Anglo-Saxon missionaries in the extension of Frankish power

The Carolingian Empire was established due to the success of a large family of the Frankish aristocracy known as the Pippinids (the future Carolingians). This family was originally from the eastern part of the Frankish kingdom known as Austrasia. While the history of this family can be traced back to the beginning of the seventh century, it was principally Pippin II of Herstal and his son Charles, nicknamed “Martel” or “the Hammer”, who affirmed their power over the Frankish kingdom. When Pippin II died in 714, his son Charles mastered the revolts of the Neustrians and then undertook the reconquest of the **regnum Francorum**. This was not accomplished without difficulty. While it is tempting to read late **Merovingian** history as the story of the progressive failure of one dynasty and the inevitable rise of another, the Pippinids, this was never the case. According to K.-F. Werner, Charles Martel was the key figure in the process that led from a “conglomerate of principalities” to a unified and centralized kingdom. He acquired immense prestige by stopping the Arab expansion from al-Andalus¹, at Moussais, near Poitiers, in 732. It was especially Charles Martel who laid the foundations of the future Carolingian system and who oversaw the first geographic extension of the authority of the Carolingians in Europe. At the time of his death in 741, the Kingdom of the Franks was the most powerful kingdom in the West.

This chapter focuses on three core elements of the establishment of Carolingian power: Charles Martel's inheritance and the major features of his policies; the reintegration of the peripheral principalities; and, finally, the consolidation of Frankish power.

1. The name given by the Muslim conquerors to the Iberian Peninsula

Genealogy of the Pippinids to Charles Martel

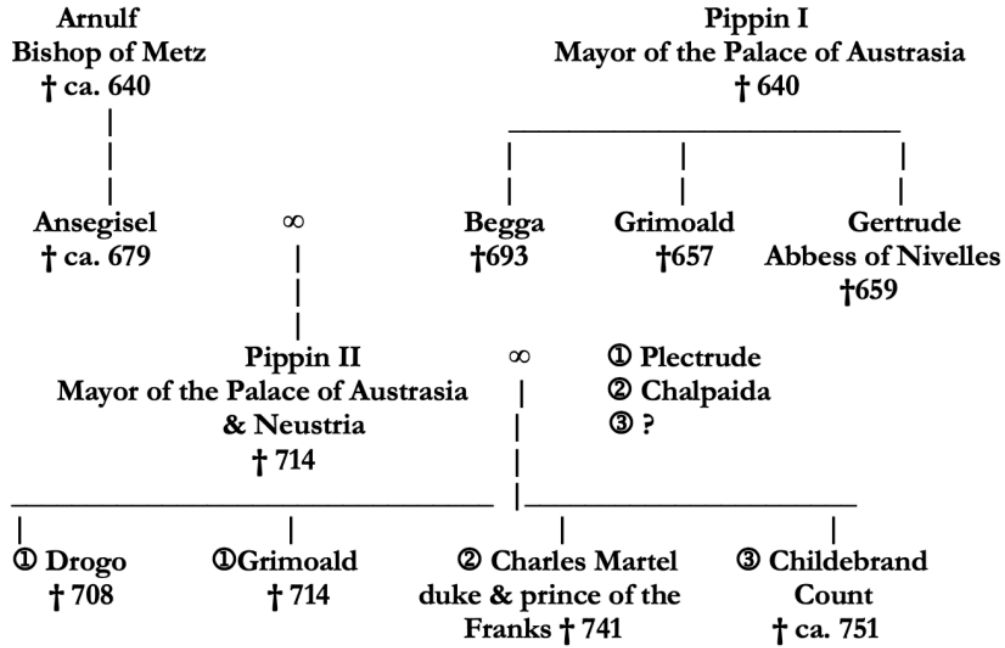


Figure 5.1 The Early Carolingians to the birth of Charles Martel

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- Genealogy of the Pippinid to Charles Martel © Barrie Brill

The Inheritance

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Charles inherited a rather favourable situation that was the result of the policies pursued by his father Pippin II of Herstal. While Charles had difficulties establishing himself as the successor of his father, he quickly established his power on a new basis, pursuing the aim of extending the influence of his family throughout the Frankish lands.

The Role of Pippin II of Herstal

The Pippinids were the result of the marriage alliance around 620 of two powerful **Austrasian** lineages, that of Arnulf, the Bishop of Metz, who possessed extensive estates in the valleys of the Meuse, the Moselle, and the middle Rhine, and Pippin I, known as “of Landen”, whose family **patrimony** was situated farther north, essentially in Brabant and Namur. The union of these two families by the marriage of the children of Arnulf and Pippin, Ansegisel and Begga, led to the concentration of important domains situated between the Meuse and the Rhine, such as Landen, Herstal, and Thoinville. After his death, miracles were said to have taken place¹ at the tomb of Arnulf, who became a saint, and this only added to the later charisma of his family. It is also true that the Pippinids had established important monasteries on their lands, such as Nivelles and Stavelot. It was here that they recruited their clients, large landowners in the region who were willing to place themselves in their service in the hope of reaping benefits: the Widonids and Unrochids, in particular, were from this region. Pippin II further increased the power of his family by marrying Plectrude, daughter of Count Hugobert [also, Chugoberctus or Hocioberctus], which brought him new domains located at the confluence of the Rhine and Moselle, in the basin of Trier and Cologne.

Due to these advantages, Pippin II was able to take control of all Austrasia in the period from 687 to 710. He also was able to conquer Neustria and thus had the two major parts of the Frankish kingdom in his hands. He was not the king but held the office of mayor of the palace. He governed in the name of a puppet king, a descendant of Clovis, who represented the legitimate authority, but who no longer exercised power in reality. When King Theuderic III died in 691, Pippin chose his successor from amongst the possible heirs.

Pippin also strengthened the position of the Franks in the north of Austrasia by successfully attacking the Kingdom of the Frisians and supporting the evangelization movement in Friesland and Alemannia. The conversion of these regions was undertaken by Anglo-Saxon missionaries. Many campaigns allowed the Franks to reconquer western Frisia, where the Northumbrian missionary Willibrord revived the church of St. Martin of Utrecht with the support of Pippin. Willibrord founded the monastery of Echternach, which became a major missionary center for Frisia, on land that belonged to the Pippinids. When Pippin and his wife Plectrude greatly increased the property of this monastery in 706, the foundation charter stated: “When Willibrord passes from this life, his brothers will freely choose an abbot. This man should show himself faithful in all things to us, to our son Grimoald, to his son, and to the sons of Drogo, our grandsons.”² Pippin had inaugurated an alliance between his family, the Anglo-Saxon missionaries and the papacy, a policy that would be perpetuated by his son Charles Martel.

1. In 640, for example, it was said that an abundance of beer was mysteriously delivered to the party tasked with moving Arnulf's body for burial.
2. Cited by Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 33.

Questions for Consideration

1. What were the most important contributions of Pippen II of Herstal?
2. Why would the alliance with the Anglo-Saxon missionaries prove so important?

Frankish Gaul c. 711

BARRIE BRILL



Figure 5.2 Regional divisions in Frankish Gaul. Courtesy of Ian Mladjov. Click anywhere on the map to open a larger version.

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The Succession

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Pippin was the first of his family to have united the office of mayor of the palace of Austrasia and Neustria under his authority. When Pippin died in 714, the two sons he had had with Plectrude had already died. Drogo, the eldest son of Pippin and Plectrude, had died in 708 while their younger son Grimoald, already mayor of the palace of Neustria, had died a few months before his father. As soon as this happened, Pippin, who was already very ill, and his wife Plectrude had proclaimed as mayor of the palace the young son of Grimoald, Theudoald, who was only six years old. When Pippin died on December 16, 714, the whole of the territories that he had subjected to Frankish authority was theoretically in the hands of a child, in whose name Plectrude ensured the regency. For all those who had accepted the tutelage of the Pippinids reluctantly, this was an opportune moment.

Pippin's death opened a major crisis which threatened not only the continuance of his own family, but also the unity of the Merovingian kingdoms. This succession crisis can also be explained by the fact there was no body in the Kingdom of the Franks that was capable of arbitrating conflicts of this type. The Merovingian monarch was a pawn in the hands of the mayors of the palace. The **episcopate** was also much involved in this conflict. The only solution was armed conflict that would bring victory to whoever could group behind him the largest number of supporters and faithful followers in the same way as Pippin II had acquired supremacy over the Frankish kingdom in 687.

However, there was another son, Charles, of a second wife by the name of Chalpaida. The *Liber historiae Francorum* mentions the birth of this son in the chapter that follows the account of the decisive victory at Tertry over Bercharius, mayor of the palace of Neustria, in 687, by his father Pippin. This victory meant that Pippin was in control of the office of mayor of the palace of Neustria. The marriage of Pippin with Chalpaida that led to the birth of Charles should be understood in the context of the preparations for this crucial confrontation with Neustria. She brought to Pippin the decisive support of a powerful network around Liège and Maastricht. After the account of the battle, the *Liber* enumerates the Merovingian kings whose deaths quickly succeeded one another without mentioning the child or his mother, who disappeared from the entourage of Pippin to the profit of his other spouse Plectrude. Charles only reappears in the *Liber* in 716 in the guise of a prisoner: "Charles, in these days, was held under guard by the lady Plectrude. With God's help, he escaped with difficulty."¹

As the son of a second wife, Charles does not bear a characteristic name of the Pippinid family, but make no mistake, he was clearly not a "bastard", a term that had little meaning in the eighth century. He was born into a world where it was understood that all the sons of a free man could take part in his inheritance, no matter which mother gave birth to them. Many of the magnates lived in a system of polygamy that distinguished between wives only by reference to the power of the family from which they came.

The Role of Plectrude

The behavior of Plectrude in these decisive years provides an important lesson in Merovingian politics. Plectrude did not intend to bequeath the inheritance of Pippin—a good part of which came from her own family—to a child of another bed. She claimed the regency over the two mayors of the palace in the name of one of her grandchildren, Theudoald, a child of six years of age. She placed Charles in custody, as she settled at Cologne where she held the loyalty of the magnates. She ruled in a climate of civil war.

The Neustrian nobility who had only reluctantly accepted the rule of Pippin now rose against the Austrasians and began to organize themselves. In September 715 they inflicted a stinging defeat on the armies of Theudoald at Compiègne. This was

1. *Liber Historiae Francorum*, chapter 51, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, ed. B. Krusch (Hanover, 1888), 325

the first time since 687 that the Neustrians had put a Pippinid army to flight. They were strengthened when King Dagobert III named as mayor of the palace one of the artisans of the victory, named Ragamfred. He was descended from a powerful family traditionally hostile to the Pippinids, like so many other aristocratic families throughout the Frankish kingdom. When Dagobert III died in the winter of 715–716, Ragamfred had a son of Childeric I, the only adult Merovingian available, taken from the monastery where he lived with the clerical name of Daniel; he was now named Chilperic II, symbolizing the revival of the Kingdom of Neustria.



Figure 5.3 Sarcophagus of Plectrude, in Saint Maria, Cologne

The situation became critical for the Austrasians and Plectrude when Ragamfred concluded an alliance with the Frisian king Radbod. The Neustrians pillaged the Ardennes and the valley of the Meuse disrupting the heart of Pippinid power, while the Frisians organized a naval raid on the Rhine valley as far as Cologne. In the spring of 716, Plectrude was forced to turn over to Ragamfred and the Neustrians a portion of the treasure (this was the key to power in the short term) of Pippin, thus acknowledging the autonomy of Neustria.

Charles, who managed to escape the prison where Plectrude had locked him up, then appeared to the Austrasians as the only individual able to save the situation. He found enough initial support amongst his father's loyal followers to move first against the Frisians and then turn against the Neustrians who he defeated at Amblève (716) in the Ardennes. These initial successes drew even more numerous and powerful men to rally to his cause. With an even larger army he definitively defeated Ragamfred and Chilperic II at Vinchy in March 717. This victory allowed him to force Plectrude to recognize him as the successor of Pippin, and she turned over to him what remained of the “treasury” of Pippin—the crown lands that represented the wealth, prestige, and power of the individual who held them. Plectrude was forced to leave the political scene and retired to her foundation of Saint Mary of Cologne where she died and was buried a short time later. The rapid growth of Charles' camp

provides support to those who see Merovingian history as a question of periodic compromises, rather than as a competition between large immutable family groups. What became abundantly clear after the victory of Vinchy, and even more so after his victory at Soissons (718), was that Charles had gathered to his side not only his relatives but also those whom he convinced, through the wealth that he had seized from Plectrude, that he was the only individual who could restore order.

The Last of the Merovingians

To demonstrate his equality with the mayor the Neustrian palace Ragamfred, Charles placed on the throne of Austrasia a Merovingian named Chlothar IV. This demonstrates the importance of the feeling of legitimacy that still surrounded the Merovingian dynasty. While it was certainly the mayors of the palace and their supporters who chose the king, it was still difficult to imagine a kingdom without a Merovingian sovereign who still possessed a charismatic power transmitted by blood. Only the family of the descendants of Clovis, in fact, possessed sovereign authority and the mayors of the palace, recruited from the Frankish aristocracy, only exercised executive power on their behalf. However, the moment was favourable since the only Merovingian then ruling, Chilperic II, had been defeated at Vinchy and had taken flight along with Ragamfred. This was enough to undermine his personal prestige and even the belief that he was supported by God. To see Chlothar as a “puppet” is to ignore the change that had taken place. While Chlothar was probably not a weighty head of the government, nonetheless, he was its soul and its justification. His name appeared on charters. Whoever had a king at his side had the right to raise the army and thus the power to conquer. This was a lesson known not only to Charles, but also to his opponents.

In the meantime, Ragamfred had allied himself with Eudo, the Duke of Aquitaine, another figure in the anti-Pippinid struggle. Thus, it was only in 719 that Charles could resume the offensive against the Neustrians and their allies. When Ragamfred was again defeated in 719 he fled to Anjou, while Eudo withdrew to Aquitaine taking with him King Chilperic II and his treasure. Chlothar had died in the meantime, so Charles negotiated with Eudo in 720. At the end of these negotiations, Charles recognized Eudo as “dux” or duke of Aquitaine, while Eudo turned over Chilperic II and the treasure to Charles Martel. Charles seized Chilperic not to eliminate him but to have him recognized as the sole king of the Frankish kingdom. In return, Chilperic II, the only Merovingian king and the last to attempt to oppose the Pippinids, acknowledged Charles Martel as mayor of the palace of the two kingdoms of Neustria and Austrasia that were reunified. Ragamfred maintained his authority over a small principality that he had carved out around Angers that he held until his death in 731. The authority of Charles was uncontested north of the Loire, where he was recognized as princeps or prince, but he was far from subjugating the regions south of the Loire.



Figure 5.4 Crowning of Chilperic II in the *Grandes chroniques de France*, a manuscript dating from the early 14th Century

Questions for Consideration

1. What roles did marriage play in the Kingdom of the Franks?
2. What does the fate of Plectrude tell us about the role of women in the Frankish elites?

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A New Foundation

BARRIE BRILL

Charles had taken over the kingdom by military means. From 719, he took the title of *dux et princeps Francorum*—duke and prince of the Franks—which reflected the origin of his power, but also indicated that he was everywhere, after the king, the second man in the kingdom. In Neustria, as in Austrasia, he exercised a power that was by nature vice-regal and he was therefore called to extend it over all the territories recognizing the nominal authority of the Merovingian King of the Franks. But for Charles to succeed in imposing himself over the magnates of the other regions who had profited, like the Pippinids, from the decadence of royal power to emerge as an autonomous power, he had to find allies and enlarge his army.

Charles first built on the inheritance of his father. The early Carolingians managed to emerge victorious because they understood how to reconcile the aristocracy with their projects. Those who entered their service and remained faithful to them could derive very substantial benefits from their fidelity. In the first rank were found, of course, the Austrasian clients of Pippin, but Charles added to them both Neustrians who entered into his alliance, and small landowners to whom he provided the means to equip themselves as warriors. Even the descendants of Plectrude profited. In 719, Hugo, grandson of Plectrude and a son of Drogo, was entrusted with the administration of the bishoprics of Paris, Rouen, Bayeux, Lisieux, and Avranches, as well as the abbeys of Saint-Denis, Saint Wandrille, and Jumièges, which allowed the mayor of the palace to control a large part of Neustria.

Charles Martel as Warlord

It is clear however that Charles was above all a warlord, insofar as he was able to impose himself by armed force, and had more troops than his father and above all troops that were organized differently. The means to hold his territories was to have at his disposal loyal followers who were settled on lands that Charles had entrusted to them—lands taken from the royal fisc (crown lands), the patrimony of the Pippinids, or the Church—in exchange for a **commendatio** that made the beneficiary a vassal who was expected to equip himself at his own expense and to follow Charles into combat in all circumstances when required. The land grant was an estate whose revenues would allow the vassal to fulfill his military responsibilities. This personal tie, which rested on vassalage, had not been invented by Charles. The tie, which consisted of a freeman placing himself in the service of a more powerful individual in order to receive protection and material support, goes back to the late Roman period. From the first centuries of the Middle Ages, powerful individuals would make grants of land to individuals who sought their support. The land granted to the individual remained the property of the individual who granted it—the individual who received the land was only granted **usufruct**. The grant was made in return for service that was more and more frequently limited to military service. From the seventh century, “private” armies existed within the Frankish aristocracy according to this model.

What was new under Charles Martel was the possibility of extending this system when the mayor of the palace had at his disposal the crown lands and Church lands to maintain his own vassals. At the same time, the old loyalty that linked the Merovingian king and his *leudes*¹ was dissipating in favour of the rise of families—mostly Austrasian—who would be the foundation of the Carolingian aristocracy and who had entered into the vassalage of Charles Martel. At this time, the status of the vassal was rising while the term *vassus*, that is to say, vassal, originally had designated a free man who was on the verge of falling into servitude, but its meaning was evolving to refer to important individuals. Now numerous important

1. A Frankish aristocrat who had sworn an oath of fidelity to the king and belonged to the king's guard.

warriors entered into the bonds of vassalage and thus augmented their original power by the addition of lands held in favour of the mayor of the palace.

Charles generalized a process that had been in existence for a long period that consisted in ensuring the fidelity and the military services of a free man in exchange for the grant of land in **usufruct**. The individual committed himself by a commendatio: he recommended himself to a more powerful individual, and this individual provided him with a beneficium—a benefit or benefice—for the services rendered. It was in a way an anticipated reward that allowed the vassal to support his family and equip himself for military service that he owed to his lord. However, this equipment was becoming more expensive since the spearhead of the Frankish army was likely, since Pippin II, a cavalryman stabilized by their stirrups and protected by a breastplate on which were sewn metal plates.

Charles was certainly not the only individual to extend his military clientele, but he was the only one to have in his hands all the crown lands and the Church lands in order to maintain his own vassals and to maintain such a large army. From the ninth century, Charles Martel would be violently criticized by the bishops of the Frankish Church, notably by the Archbishop Hincmar of Reims, who denounced him as a spoliator of the lands of the Church who was suffering for his sins in hell [see Document 1]. At the beginning of the eighth century, Charles in fact pursued the policies of his predecessors. By utilizing a portion of the Church lands, he was no doubt only reaffirming the public character of these lands that had once been given by the Christian emperor or by the Merovingian kings to the Church, in return for a certain number of services.

Finally, it should be noted that in the exercise of power Charles Martel kept the reins of power in his hands far more than his father Pippin II, who had largely associated the members of his family in the exercise of power. The spouse of Charles does not appear in any charter and she does not seem to have played a political role, while their sons, Pippin and Carloman, never exercised any responsibility during the lifetime of their father, no more than did the three sons of his second spouse Ruodhaid. Unlike his father, Charles was not satisfied with supremacy over the two Frankish kingdoms of Neustria and Austrasia, but used his powerful army in an expansionist project that would eventually reach its culmination in the creation of the Frankish empire by his grandson Charlemagne. In the end, it was political expansion through war that was the foundation of Carolingian power since this is what reinforced the power of the chieftain and increased his wealth by booty and confiscation, some of which was then redistributed to his faithful followers.

Questions for Consideration

1. What were the most important techniques used by Charles Martel to secure the power of the Pippinids?
2. What are the limitations of 'political expansion through war' as a foundation of power?

Hincmar of Reims against Charles Martel

BARRIE BRILL

Letter from the Synod of Quierzy to Louis the German, 858

Hincmar of Reims reported to the Council of Quierzy, in 858, the vision that Bishop Eucherius of Orléans had seen during the reign of King Pippin III (the Short) over a century before. Eucherius was likely a nephew of Savaric [see Document 2], and of noble background. Establishing control over Francia meant reducing the independence of such lords. After his victory over the Muslims in 732, Charles was consolidating his hold on Burgundy and Eucherius had opposed him. Charles drove out Eucherius and his kinsmen and seized their lands to distribute to his own followers. This was not really a case of “secularisation”, but rather the confiscation of the resources of a great family whose wealth was based on an episcopal lordship. The memory of his treatment, which was preserved in his *Life*, was one of the reasons why the bishop was later venerated as a saint, and as his reputation grew, so did that of Charles Martel as a despoiler of Church lands. Eucherius was exiled to Cologne and retired to the Abbey of Saint Trond, where he spent his last years in prayer and contemplation until his death in 743. Hincmar used this vision of Eucherius a century later to support his arguments for the restoration of Church properties that had been seized over the centuries.

It was prince Charles¹, father of King Pippin², who was the first among all the kings and princes of the Franks to wrest and separate the goods of the churches from the churches: for this reason alone he was eternally damned. That was revealed by obvious signs. For the holy bishop Eucherius³ of Orléans, who rests in the monastery of Saint Trond, while kneeling in prayer was seized and taken to another world, and amongst other things that the Lord showed him, he saw Charles being tortured in the bottom of hell. When Eucherius questioned the angel who was leading him about, the angel replied that by the judgement of the saints, who will judge in the future judgement with the Lord, and whose property he took and divided up: before that judgement, he [Charles] was condemned in body and soul to eternal punishment, and he had received these punishments both for his own sins but also for the sins of all those who, for the purpose of redeeming their souls, had given their goods and properties in the honour and love of the Lord to the places of the saints for the lighting of the divine worship and for the sustenance of the servants of Christ and the poor.

1. This refers to Charles Martel (d. 741)

2. Pippin III the Short (d. 768)

3. Eucherius of Orléans (687-738). *Vita Eucherii Episcopi Aureliensis*, ed. W. Levison, MGH, *Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. VII, [Hannover, 1920], 46-53.



When Eucherius returned to himself, he called upon the holy Boniface⁴ and Fulrad, Abbot of the monastery of Saint-Denis and the arch-chaplain of King Pippin⁵; he explained what he had seen to them, and gave as proof that they should go to Charles's tomb, and if they could not find his body there, they must believe in the truth of his words. Therefore, they went to the aforementioned monastery where Charles's body was buried; they opened his tomb and suddenly a dragon emerged, and the whole interior of the tomb was found to be blackened, as if it had been burned. We ourselves knew those who survived down to our time and who were present at this event and they testified to us verbally the truth of what they had heard and seen.

Questions for Consideration

Figure 5.5 The Vision of St Eucherius as imagined by Jacques Callot in 1636.

1. Why did the Church oppose the actions of Charles Martel even as Martel was backing the expansion of Christendom via Anglo-Saxon missionaries?
2. Click to enlarge the image above. In what way does the artist reflect the concerns of the 17th Century?

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4. This refers to Boniface, the Anglo-Saxon missionary to the Germanic lands

5. Fulrad, abbot of St. Denis and arch-chaplain and advisor to both Pippin III and Charlemagne.

Extract from the History of the Bishops of Auxerre (ca. 715-720)

BARRIE BRILL

In the seventh century, bishops tended to impose themselves at the head of the public administration. The fact was that many bishops were from aristocratic families and they often acted like their lay brethren. This pre-eminence of bishops asserted itself particularly in Burgundy and Neustria where royal power weakened and struggles between aristocratic factions developed. In some places they were able to assume control of the lay administration and exercised the powers of the count so that they had an upper hand in taxation, justice, and the holding of public markets. Finally, some of them had an army, one example being Savaric, the Bishop of Auxerre and Orléans who set out to conquer the dioceses or neighbouring counties. After 687, the mayors of the palace of Austrasia now also governed Neustria and Burgundy and they endeavoured to destroy these ecclesiastical principalities. Both Pippin of Herstal and his son Charles Martel strove to make a clear distinction between episcopal power and the power of counts. They confiscated many ecclesiastical properties to distribute them not only amongst their vassals, but also to their counts. They attempted to wrest the judicial, fiscal, and military rights that the bishops had seized and invest these powers in the counts.

Gesta pontificum Autissiodorensium

Savaric¹ held the see for five years, four months. This man, as the public rumour affirms, began, due to the very great nobility of his family, to deviate somewhat from his state and condition to devote himself greedily to secular affairs, more than is appropriate for a bishop, to the point of invading with a troop of soldiers the regions of Orléans as well as Nevers, and also Tonnerre, as well as Avallon and Troyes, submitting them to his domination: at that time, in fact, the Franks, in disagreement with each other, started very many civil wars, rushing against each other in the forest of Cuise, [and] they were exterminated in gigantic carnage.² So, also this same bishop, neglecting the episcopal dignity, after having assembled a very large troop from all sides [and] headed for Lyon, was struck suddenly by divine anger, dying without delay, and here is how he was brought back to his own city and he was buried in the basilica of Saint-Germain next to his predecessors. This happened in the days of King Dagobert the Younger³ and Daniel, who, after changing his name, was

1. Savaric, bishop of Auxerre and of Orléans.

2. In the course of this battle that took place on September 26, 715, in the forest of Cuise near Compiègne, the Neustrians defeated and put to flight Theudoald who had been imposed as mayor of the palace in Neustria by his grandmother Plectrude.

3. Dagobert III, king of the Franks from 711 to 715/716.

called Chilperic⁴ and from that time became king, while Pippin⁵, mayor of the palace with Plectrude⁶, ruled the principality.

Questions for Consideration

1. How does the author characterize the actions of Savaric?
2. What do extracts such as this reveal about the balance of clerical and secular power in this time period?

4. Chilperic II, King of the Franks 715/716-721.

5. Pippin II, mayor of the place of Austrasia, who dominated Neustria-Burgundy from 687 through the intermediary Nordebert, then his own son Grimoald, and died in 714.

6. Plectrude, wife of Pippin of Herstal.

Reintegration of the Peripheral Principalities

BARRIE BRILL

Charles Martel's policy led him to intervene militarily against the new forms of political organization that appeared at the end of the seventh century. This involved moving against the peripheral principalities that had emerged in southern Gaul, as well as in the eastern Germanic lands.

Origin of the Principalities

At the end of the seventh century, the Kingdom of the Franks, that is to say all the territories that were under control of the Merovingian kings, witnessed a process of dissolution that was related to the weakening of the monarchy. In many regions, magnates, both secular and ecclesiastical, who had received from the Merovingian monarch the power to govern at the local level, were more and more tempted to exercise it autonomously, while still recognizing the nominal authority of the Merovingian king who remained the sole source of legitimacy. In the process they created a new form of political organization, the principality, which was a territory or region governed by a non-royal dynasty. The Kingdom of the Franks by the end of the seventh century had become a conglomerate of principalities whose leaders claimed equality with the mayor of the palace of Neustria-Austrasia who had **arrogated** to himself the title of **princeps Francorum**.

These principalities were of two kinds. First, especially in Burgundy, episcopal principalities had emerged that were made up of several dioceses whose bishop, [like Savaric of Auxerre](#), assumed all the local administration not only exercising the powers of a count, but also possessing an army. Secondly, the majority of the principalities, such as Aquitaine, Bavaria or Provence, generally had a regional character and were led by an aristocratic family such as the Agilofings in Bavaria or the family of Maurontus in Provence. This should not be interpreted as hostility to Frankish domination since most of these families were of Frankish origin themselves and had been put in place, some as early as the sixth century, by the Merovingian king whose theoretical authority they continued to recognize. What was at issue was who could claim authority over all free men. Clearly the mayor of the palaces of Neustria and Austrasia had a delegation of power in the name of the Merovingian king. The chieftains of the peripheral regions felt that they had received a similar delegation of power concerning their principality from the king and did not have to bow to the wishes of Charles Martel who was only their equal and not their superior. Charles was determined to demonstrate that this was not the case.

Aquitaine, Burgundy, and Provence

Aquitaine was a vast region that extended south of the Loire where Frankish penetration had never been very strong. Duke Eudo¹ had negotiated with Charles Martel in 720 and had been recognized as governing in an autonomous and legitimate manner. Eudo created a principality around Bordeaux and Toulouse, where he had to not only watch his northern border, but especially his southern border where he faced Muslim incursions from Spain.

The Iberian peninsula had been invaded by Muslim forces in 711 and quickly fell into their hands; they then advanced over the Pyrenees seizing Narbonne in 719, followed by Carcassonne and Nîmes in 725. This allowed them to launch numerous raids along the valley of the Rhône. In 721, the **wali** of Cordoba, Al-Samh ibn Malik al-Khawlani, laid siege to Toulouse. Eudo with his own troops, including Basque contingents, saved the city in a battle where the wali was killed.

1. Sometimes rendered Odo, or Eudes



Figure 5.6 A drawing from 1756 of Eudo, Duke of Aquitaine at the Battle of Toulouse 721.

This victory of Eudo made a great impression on Christendom, and the *Liber Pontificalis*, the official chronicle of the popes, states that more than 375,000 “Saracens” [Muslims] fell, while Eudo only lost 1,500 troops—a greatly exaggerated number.² The account portrays Eudo as defender of Christendom.

Eudo did not manage to push the Muslims back over the Pyrenees and the situation remained very difficult. Around 729, Eudo made an alliance with a Berber chieftain who had rebelled against the wali of Cordoba, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Ghafiqi. Eudo likely did this in an attempt to protect himself from further raids. However, this alliance turned out to be a mistake. The wali decided to lead an army in person to punish the rebel chieftain and his allies, forcing Eudo to seek military support from Charles. In March, 732, the army of ‘Abd al-Rahman attacked from the west from Pamplona and pushed into Aquitaine and attacked Bordeaux pillaging along the way. Eudo was unable to prevent this and the Muslim forces pushed into northern Aquitaine where they looted Poitiers. They continued their advance along the old Roman road to Tours, likely attracted by the most famous and wealthy sanctuary in all of Gaul, that of Saint Martin. This sanctuary had been enriched by the offerings of generations of pilgrims and monarchs since Saint Martin was the patron saint of the Merovingian dynasty. On the route to Tours, the Muslims encountered the army of Charles Martel on October 25, 732, and were defeated near the hamlet of Moussais. This was the famous “Battle of Poitiers” (or “Battle of Tours”) that was later seen by European chroniclers as the pivotal moment in halting the westward advance of Muslim power. More recently historians have questioned this perspective, given that Muslim sources generally accord the battle little significance.

Several things should be noted. At the time, the battle revealed the superiority of the Frankish cavalry. Charles did not rush to rescue his rival Eudo. Essentially, he only blocked the passage of the Muslim forces to Tours. He did nothing to prevent the Muslims from ravaging Aquitaine for the next six months. This was not enough to break the principality of Aquitaine. However, when Eudo died in 735, Charles marched his troops into the Garonne valley and seized Bordeaux. He then forced the new duke, Hunoald, to pledge his fealty.

Once he had defeated the Muslims, Charles took advantage of the contingents that he had on hand to reduce the

2. *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis)*, trans. Raymond Davis (Liverpool, 1992), 8.

independence of the local magnates and episcopal principalities that had emerged due to the weakening of royal power in the last third of the seventh century. These episcopal principalities had emerged in Orléans, Sens, Auxerre, Autun, Mâcon, and Lyon. Most of the bishops were deported to Austrasia to spend the rest of their days confined to a monastery while the properties of the Church were distributed to the faithful followers of Charles Martel. These bishoprics were crucial in controlling the access routes to Aquitaine and especially to Provence.

Charles appointed his own faithful followers and members of his family as counts in these regions. He also confiscated most of the abbeys that had belonged to these bishops and turned them over to members of his own family. In this way the Pippinids had numerous strongpoints in the region. This policy was not new since it took up what Pippin II had done in Neustria, but on a completely different scale. The network of abbeys under the control of the Pippinids formed the first ecclesiastical structure on which the new Carolingian power would be based. Furthermore, this policy of Charles Martel was the origin of the incorporation of the Church into the apparatus of the monarchy, a process that made the final seizure of power by the Carolingians possible.

By reducing the episcopal principalities of Burgundy and the Rhône valley, Charles had opened the way towards the south where the Franks faced the Muslims and an independent local nobility. The Battle of Poitiers had not ended Muslim incursions into Gaul but turned their attention towards Languedoc, which they already occupied in part. It seems that the success of Charles around Lyon had led the Patrician Maurontus of Provence, a leader of the local aristocracy, to ally himself with the Muslims of Narbonne and cede to them the strong point of Avignon. Maurontus, his family and his allies represented a portion of the nobility hostile to the Pippinid mayor of the palace. Charles designated his half-brother Childebrand to dislodge the Muslims at Avignon. He managed to seize Avignon in 737. This opened the route of Languedoc and Charles and his half-brother besieged Narbonne, which was the strong point of the Muslim presence in Gaul. They did not manage to seize Narbonne and on the return route the Franks pillaged and burned Béziers, Nîmes, and Agde to deprive the Muslims of strongholds. In 738, Maurontus again rose up in a revolt that provoked another expedition by Charles. Provence was definitively mastered by Charles in 739 likely with help from the Lombards. He then confiscated the lands of Maurontus and his supporters, redistributing them to his loyal Austrasian followers but also to some nobles in Provence who had supported his cause and rejected the authority of Maurontus. One local beneficiary of this was the family of Count Abbo who became the new strong man in Provence and later founded the Abbey of Novalesse at the foot of Mount Cenis, from which he commanded the valleys and roads that led from Gaul to Lombard Italy.

Alemannia and Bavaria

In Alemannia, a county family had been placed in power by the Merovingian king; however, he had taken advantage of the weakening authority of Merovingian monarchy to take the title of duke. From 710 until 725, Lantfrid of Alemannia ruled as an independent prince and considered the mayor of the palace to be no more than his equal. In his legislative activity in the revision of the Alemannian law code Lantfrid mentions the role of the Merovingian king but completely ignores the duke of the Franks. Charles Martel moved militarily to reimpose Frankish authority in the region in two campaigns in 725 and 728. When Lantfrid died in 730, Charles launched two further military expeditions, in 730 and 732, to curtail the authority of his brother and successor Theudebald. Ducal authority was now limited to the Neckar valley and the eastern slopes of the Black Forest.

In Germany, the main rival to Charles was the Duke of Bavaria, Theodo of the Agilofing family. This family had been put in place by the Merovingian king in the sixth century and for a very long time had been considered as a dynasty. They led a region that had a strong regional identity and were traditionally allied with the Lombard dynasty. When Theodo died in 717, the duchy had been shared between his son and his nephew, Grimoald and Hugbert, who quickly fell into conflict with one another. Charles took advantage of the situation and launched two military campaigns in 725 and 728 that caused the fall of Grimoald, who died in combat. Charles imposed his candidate, Hugbert, nephew of the former duke, but in return the duke had to give up the northern portion of his territory, the Nordgau. Charles Martel returned also with considerable booty and several women of the ducal family, including Sunnichild, who became his second wife after the death of Chrotrude. When

Hugbert died in 736, the duchy was entrusted to Odilo, a close relative of Sunnichild, who quickly pursued an independent policy and became, in the 740s, the leader of anti-Pippinid sentiment in the peripheral principalities.

Questions for Consideration

1. In what ways did Charles Martel maintain power once it had be secured in a region?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to the maintenance of power?

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Echo of the Battle of Toulouse, 721

BARRIE BRILL

The *Liber Pontificalis* provides a rather muddled account of the early incursions of the Muslims of Spain across the Pyrenees. Eudo, Duke of Aquitaine, had played a role in the struggles that pitted Charles Martel against the Neustrians. Ragamfred, the Neustrian mayor of the palace, had gained the support of Eudo in this struggle with Charles Martel, but after the Neustrians were defeated by Charles in 719 Eudo withdrew to Aquitaine taking with him Chilperic II, the King of Neustria. Eudo negotiated with Charles and in return for recognition of his status as Duke of Aquitaine, he turned over Chilperic II to Charles. Eudo needed to make peace due to the Muslim incursions that resulted in the seizure of Narbonne in 720 and the siege of Toulouse in 721. Eudo was victorious against them at Toulouse and had sent word of the victory to Rome. The numbers that supposedly were involved in the battle are extreme exaggerations, as was the pious invention of the liturgical sponges¹ mentioned in the account, as a shield against the Muslims. Eudo was faced with continuous pressure from the Muslims who continued to occupy Narbonne and other towns and launched numerous raids northward.

The Liber Pontificalis

At this time the noxious people of the Saracens before had invaded the whole province of Spain for ten years already. The eleventh year, they endeavoured to cross the Rhône by occupying Francia whose head was Eudo.² The latter called for a general mobilization of the Franks against the Saracens, whom they surrounded and killed. Three hundred and seventy-five thousand were exterminated in one day, according to the letter that Duke Eudo sent to the pontiff. It was also read that there were only 1,500 killed among the Franks. He also added that the previous year, there had been sent to them by the holy man as evidence of blessing three sponges³ used at the pontifical table at the moment when the war had been declared. This same Eudo, prince of Aquitaine, had then distributed small pieces of them to his people to protect them and [they worked] so well that among those who had participated in the battle, none had been wounded had neither been wounded nor killed.

1. A small piece of sponge used to collect the remnants of the Eucharist and thus believed to be invested with the sacred power of the Eucharist
2. Eudo, Duke of Aquitaine (ca. 681-735).
3. As above, small pieces of sponge that had been used to capture fragments of the Eucharist - the consecrated bread

The Battle of Poitiers as Viewed by an Anonymous Christian Mozarabic Chronicler Living in Cordoba

BARRIE BRILL

The Mozarabic Chronicle, which begins in 611 and ends in 754, was written by a Latin Christian living in Al-Andalus. It seems that it was conceived as a continuation of the historical work of Isidore of Seville. It differs on important points from other sources on the Battle of Poitiers. As you read through this document, and the one that follows, note the differences in interpretation.

The Mozarabic Chronicle

Then 'Abd al-Rahman¹, seeing the earth full of the multitude of his army, crossing the mountains of the Basques and treading the passes like plains, descended into the land of the Franks; and already entering it, he struck the sword so much that Eudo, having prepared for combat on the other side of the river called Garonne or Dordogne, was put to flight. Only God can count the number of dead and wounded. Then 'Abd al-Rahman while pursuing the said Eudo decided to go and pillage the Church of Tours while destroying on his way the palaces and burning the churches. But the mayor of the palace of Austrasia, in the interior of Francia, named Charles, a bellicose man from a young age and expert in the military arts, warned by Eudo, confronted him [i.e. 'Abd al-Rahman and his army]. At this point, for seven days, the two adversaries harassed one another seeking to choose the place of battle, then finally, preparing for combat; but while they are fighting with violence, the people of the North, remaining motionless at first sight like a wall, pressed against each other, like an area of freezing cold, massacred the Arabs with sword blows. But when the people of Austrasia, superior by the mass of their limbs and more ardent by their iron-armed hand, striking at the heart, had found the king ['Abd al-Rahman], they killed him; as soon as it got dark, the fighting ended and they raised their swords in the air with contempt. Then, the next day, seeing the huge Arab camp, they prepared for combat. Drawing the sword, at daybreak, the Europeans observed the tents of the Arabs arranged in order. They did not know that they were empty; they thought that inside were phalanxes of Saracens ready for combat; they sent scouts who discovered that the columns of the Ishmaelites had fled. All of them, in silence, during the night, had gone away in strict order towards their country. The Europeans², however, feared that by hiding along the paths, the Saracens would ambush them. Also, what a surprise when they found themselves after having gone around the camp in vain. And, as these aforementioned peoples did not care about the pursuit, having shared between them the booty and the spoils, they returned joyfully to their homelands.

1. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ghafiqi, Wali of al-Andalus on behalf of the Umayyad caliph at Damascus.

2. This account by a Spanish cleric provides the first occurrence of the word "Europeans" in a text.

Questions for Consideration

1. In this account, what are the key factors leading to the Muslim retreat?
2. In what ways does the author frame the account to support his own belief system?

The Battle of Poitiers as Viewed by the First Continuator of the Chronicle of Fredegar

BARRIE BRILL

The first continuator of Fredegar's Chronicle was Childebrand, the uncle of Pippin III and thus a source favourable to the Pippinids. Chapter 13, below, refers to the Battle of Poitiers. This version of the Battle of Poitiers claims that Duke Eudo called on the Muslims for support, when in fact he called on Charles for support in his struggle against the Muslim attackers.

Fredegarii et aliorum chronica

During the same period, Duke Eudo withdrew from the terms of the treaty. When Prince Charles learned of this, he raised his army and crossed the river Loire; Duke Eudo was put to flight and Charles returned home with a large quantity of booty taken from his enemies for the second time in one year. Since Duke Eudo saw that he had been overturned and was the subject of derision, he called upon the faithless Saracens to support him against prince Charles and the Frankish people. The Saracens marched out under their king, who was called 'Abd al-Rahman, crossed the Garonne, and reached the city of Bordeaux; burning churches and killing people, they advanced as far as Poitiers; burning the church of Saint Hilary, which is painful to report, and intended to destroy the house of the blessed Martin. Against them, Prince Charles boldly deployed his troops against them and, warrior that he is, fell upon them. With Christ's help, he pulled down their tents, rushing into battle to grind them to pieces, and when he had prostrated and killed their king 'Abd al-Rahman, he defeated their forces; and so he triumphed, a victor over his enemies.

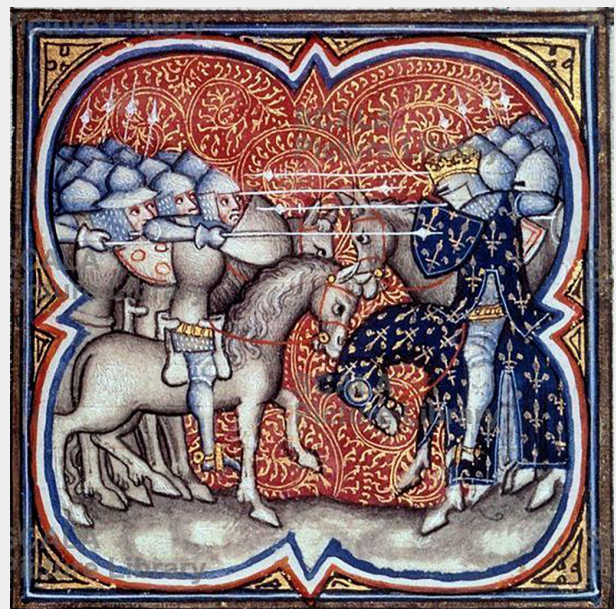


Figure 5.7 Charles Martel at the Battle of Poitiers 732; Jean Fouquet (c. 1420–c. 1477) *Les grandes chroniques de France*.

Questions for Consideration

1. In what ways does this account differ from the previous one?
2. In what ways does the author frame this account to support his own belief system?
3. Taken together, what can we conclude from these documents about the Battle of Poitiers?

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- [Charles Martel fighting the Saracens at Tours-Poitiers in 732, Great Chronicles of France \(27408010460\)](#)
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Consolidation

BARRIE BRILL

From the 730s, it can be said that Charles occupied a 'vice-regal' position that was widely recognized, albeit still unsanctioned. Nonetheless, he still had to consolidate Frankish power in the newly conquered territories, particularly in the north and east. This led him actively to support the evangelization policy carried out in the regions by Anglo-Saxon missionaries.

The Extension of Frankish Rule in Frisia and Germany

The succession crisis of 714 had revealed the extent of the danger that threats from the peripheral areas could pose for the Franks. The Frisians, Saxons, and Aquitainians had taken advantage of the disarray to launch pillaging raids especially against Austrasia. All Charles' work north and east of the Rhine seems to have been part of a project to create a barrier dedicated to protecting the kingdom. He defended vulnerable borders by erecting new fortresses such as that of Christenberg near Marburg. He encouraged colonization by those Austrasians who later would be called orientales Franci (eastern Franks) of the region of the lower and middle valleys of the Main that was well on the way of becoming Franconia. This provided a route to the east and also provided more convenient access to the southern duchies of Bavaria and Alemannia.

In Frisia, Charles broke with the policies of his predecessors since he understood that, to definitively integrate western Frisia, it would be necessary to attack the centre of Frisian resistance east of the Rhine. To accomplish this, he mounted a naval expedition, utilizing the services of the Frisians who had already submitted to his authority, and succeeded in controlling the whole of Frisia after 734.

Against the Saxons, Charles did not have the means to act directly, but he organized a protective barrier in middle Germany, reinforcing the Frankish colonization along the lower and middle Main valley. This afforded some protection against the Saxons. This policy that sought to control the territories east of the Rhine by military means was completed by the support that Charles provided to the Anglo-Saxon missionaries who were undertaking to evangelize the region.

Support for Willibrord and Boniface's Mission

Frisia and Alemannia were favoured regions of Anglo-Saxon missionaries in the eighth century. Willibrord, a missionary monk from England, settled at Utrecht, which was a Frankish advance post in contact with the Frisians. The Frisians were pagans and were hostile to Christianity. The military campaigns of Pippin had opened the region to missionaries and the installation of churches. Willibrord was anxious to have his activities approved by the papacy and travelled to Rome in 695. At the time of this visit, he was consecrated Bishop of the Frisians. His mission now had a national or ethnic framework recognized by the Church. He also had need of the resources and the support offered by the Austrasian mayor of the palace and his family. In 697–698, they had donated the land for a family monastery that was established at Echternach and was devoted to the education of missionary monks. The undertaking was so political that the death of Pippin, in 714, was followed by a general uprising in Frisia and a temporary return to paganism. Charles Martel, like his father, pursued the same ends, and he inflicted a major military defeat on the Frisians and supported Willibrord and his disciples.

Another missionary, Winfrid, had remained a monk in Wessex until he was about forty. He had entered the monastery of Nursling as an **oblate** and received an excellent education from various scholars including the grammarian Aldhelm. Winfrid became a teacher in the monastic school and gained a reputation as a scholar. He was elected abbot of Nursling in 717, an office that he quickly gave up in order to devote himself to the conversion of his Saxon brethren who had remained on the continent and who were still pagan. He visited Willibrord in 716

and again in 719. He took the model of Willibrord to heart and like him only envisaged his missionary activity in close relation with the pope. Winfrid landed in Friesland, but went to Rome in order to seek the support of Pope Gregory II. On May 15, 719, the pope recognized Winfrid as his representative and gives him the name of Boniface as a sign of the link that united him to the Roman **see**. Boniface began to work in the central Germanic territories and then returned to Rome in 722, where he was ordained bishop without a fixed see. He then sought the official support of the mayor of the palace, who granted him without any restriction the possibility of using all the administrative and military structures set up by the Franks. His continuous success as a missionary led Pope Gregory II in 732 to give Boniface the **pallium** thus making Boniface an archbishop with authority throughout Germany.

With all these supports, Boniface set up the first ecclesiastical network in the central and southern Germanic territories. In Wurzburg, the former political centre of the dukes of Thuringia, Boniface founded the first episcopal seat of the region in 741, based on the heritage of the Irish missionary Kilian (d. 690), and he considered the region sufficiently Christianized to implant there three monastic communities of Anglo-Saxon nuns. These ecclesiastical structures supported the Frankish colonization movement in the Upper Main Valley. Further north, where he himself felled the sacred oak dedicated to Thor near Geismar, he founded two dioceses, Erfurt and Bûrburg, whose existence was constantly threatened by the Saxon raids. In 744, he founded the monastery that was destined to become the great centre of missionary activity in Saxony: Fulda. Here he promoted the rule of Saint Benedict. Boniface went on to reorganize the church in Bavaria with the consent of Duke Odilo. He continued his missionary activity and would die a martyr in an ambush in Dokkum in June 754 in Frisia, where he had begun his missionary activity decades before. His body was buried at Fulda. While these territories beyond the Rhine were difficult to control, they were always part of a zone of influence of the Austrasians in general and the Pippinids in particular.



Figure 5.8 Saint Boniface from the Sacramentary of Fulda, Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek. The upper register of this illumination shows Boniface baptising a new convert while the lower register shows his martyrdom in 754.

Questions for Consideration

1. In what ways did Charles' alliance with the Anglo-Saxon missionaries serve to strengthen his control throughout the region?
2. What challenges remained for Charles' successors?

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Charles Martel, Princeps and Subregulus (Prince and Viceroy)

BARRIE BRILL

In all his activities, Charles Martel behaved like a true princeps, that is to say, filling the charges that were normally those of the king, particularly with regard to the Church. In 737, King Theuderic IV died after ruling for sixteen years. Charles did not see the need to appoint a successor. Charles may have acted like a king, but had always had a Merovingian in whose name he had acted. Did the mayor of the palace fear to bring from the shadows a young Merovingian who might be able to group around himself the still numerous opponents of Charles? It is more likely a sign of the growing confidence of Charles due to his military successes. Perhaps he wanted to keep his own sons and relatives and all other potential candidates to the throne in suspense to temper the ambitions of some by those of others?

The French historian Olivier Guillot has given another form of response that is more institutional, since he gives the title of “prince” attached to Charles Martel considerable importance.¹ In short, being princeps, as the *Liber Historiae Francorum* continuously refers to Charles after 721, would signify the assumption of the prerogatives of a Roman emperor, including being the source of the law and, in the kingdom of the Franks, to freely dispose of ecclesiastical offices and the goods of the Church.² Thus, the princeps could easily do without a king. There are reasons why the continuator of the *Chronicle of Fredegar* might not be taken at face value. The author of the text was Childebrand, the half-brother of Charles, who likely wrote shortly after 751. Perhaps he projected on Charles truths that are only testified under his son Pippin. And while we might suspect the continuator of the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, surely Pope Gregory III is to be believed when he addressed to Charles three letters copied and preserved in the Carolingian archives in which the pope sought the support of Charles as subregulus—viceroy—in the quarrel that opposed the pope to Liutprand, king of the Lombards:

At this time, the holy father Gregory sent to the princeps Charles from the Roman see of Saint Peter the Apostle, an embassy provided with the keys of the tomb along with the chains of Saint Peter as well as rich and numerous gifts; such as never had been seen nor heard of before.³

The papal letters and presents had no effect. Charles received the pope’s messengers with honour, but limited his response to an embassy to Rome in 740 led by Grimo of Corbie and Sigebert, a hermit at Saint Denis. While they brought fair words to the pope and gifts for St. Peter’s, they brought no military support. After all, Charles had no quarrel with the king of the Lombards who had provided him support when he was fighting in Provence and who had also adopted his son. While Gregory III met with little success, his appeal illustrates the prestige of Charles in Rome.

Although Charles had never attempted to seize the crown, many details demonstrate that he wanted to be placed on the

1. Olivier Guillot, “Princeps à l’époque carolingienne, une prééminence l’emportant sur le titre de roi?” in A. Dubreucq & Chr. Lauranson-Rosax (dir.), *Traditio iuris* (Lyon, 2005), 213-231.
2. The anonymous *Liber Historiae Francorum* stands with Gregory of Tours’ *History of the Franks* and Fredegar’s *Chronicle* and its continuations as the three sources that together provide the outlines of what took place in Merovingian Gaul. See B. Krusch, ed., *Liber Historiae Francorum* [*Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum: Monumenta Germanica Historica* (Hanover, 1888), vol. II.
3. Second Continuator of Fredegar, chapter 22, see B. Krusch, ed., *Fredegarii et aliorum Chronica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. II, 178-179.

same level as the royal dignity. Perhaps this why at some time after 734 he had sent his son Pippin to the court of the king of the Lombards so that Pippin would be adopted by Liutprand according to Lombard custom. The ceremony involved Liutprand cutting the hair of Pippin and presenting him with the weapons that made him a young adult warrior. Whatever the real advantages of this adoption, in any case, it made Pippin the “son of a king”. It might be also noted that Charles had tended to use the Merovingian palaces of the valley of the Oise as his residences and more tellingly that he did not choose to be buried at Metz, following the custom of his family, but rather at the abbey of Saint-Denis, a royal foundation in the heart of Neustria and the necropolis of the Merovingians since Dagobert I. His son Pippin had been educated at Saint-Denis as well.



Figure 5.9 Charles Martel invests the two kingdoms of Austrasia and Neustria to his sons Carloman and Pippin.

On the eve of his death, in the late spring of 741, Charles “with the counsel of the magnates”, that is to say with the support of his closest followers, partitioned the Frankish kingdom as if he were a king, favouring the two children he had with Chrotrude, his first wife. His eldest son Carloman received the eastern portion—that is to say, Austrasia, Alemannia, and Thuringia (without Bavaria), while the younger son Pippin would “rule” over Neustria, Burgundy and Provence; Aquitaine was not mentioned. This partition conformed to the Merovingian tradition that generally associated Austrasia and its Germanic territories on the one hand and Neustria and Burgundy on the other. This partition did not mention Grifo, the

son that Charles had had with the Bavarian Sunnichild. This partition of Charles was ratified by the leading nobles who certainly had an interest in assuring that the mayors of the palace remained Pippinid.

The last years of Charles, whose health had been poor since 739, were marked by a strengthening of what might be called a “Bavarian party” around Sunnichild for a number of reasons. First and foremost, there was the presence at the Frankish court of the Duke of Bavaria, Odilo, who was a close relative of Sunnichild. Odilo had taken refuge at the Frankish court after being driven out by the Bavarian aristocracy and had caused a scandal by seducing the daughter of Charles, Chiltrude. From this union was born in 741 Tassilo, a future duke of Bavaria. The final reason is likely due to the fact that it was Sunnichild and Grifo, and not Carloman and Pippin, who surrounded Charles in the last months of his life and finally succeeded in obtaining as an inheritance some counties located at the very centre of the kingdom, straddling Austrasia, Neustria, and Burgundy.

When the mayor of the palace, who had almost reached the royal dignity, died at his palace of Quierzy on October 22, 741, he had insured the supremacy of his family over an immense portion of the kingdom of the Franks. He was buried at St. Denis beside the Merovingian kings. It was the end of a great reign of over a quarter of the century. At the beginning of the eighth century, it seemed as if Europe was moving towards a fragmented political order of autonomous princedoms ruled by local dukes. Charles Martel had arrested this process and assembled under a central authority nearly every region of the west. His success was due to the warrior followers whom he set up in the subdued regions and enriched with land, abbeys, and bishoprics. Charles had supported missionaries such as Boniface and Pirmin and seems to have understood that their work not only brought Christianity to the Germanic peoples, but also at the same time drew these converts into the sphere of Frankish influence. Despite his many accomplishments, Charles Martel is most often remembered for only two events of his reign: the victory at Poitiers and the secularizations of ecclesiastical property [Document 1]. The power of Charles had been such that, at the death of king Theuderic IV, he did not think it was necessary to replace him. However, when Charles died in 741, his two sons, Carloman and Pippin, who had received the bulk of his inheritance, faced a rebellion that revealed the limits of Pippinid power.

Questions for Consideration

1. Why would the leading nobles have endeavoured to ensure the continuation of Pippinid power, rather than a restoration of Merovingian authority?
2. What were the limits of Pippinid power in 741?

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Council of Estinnes, 743

BARRIE BRILL

Concilia Aevi Karolini

The argument that Charles Martel exploited church lands is not supported by eighth century sources. This was a period when many bishoprics and monasteries lost control of a considerable proportion of their estates. The Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface had complained about the standards of the Frankish Church. A church that allowed warriors into its ranks such as Savarac [see document 2 above] was indeed in a difficult position, but this was likely more due to the general political and military turmoil of the period than to the specific policies of Charles Martel. It was largely after Charles that the practice became more common under his sons and grandsons who were known to be concerned to reform the morals of the Church. Charles was presumed to have been less concerned about the falling standards that Boniface had pointed out, and, as a result, he was blamed for the ongoing loss of clerical lands. It seems that since they voiced their concerns for the church, these later rulers were able to acquire the moral authority to use church lands as if they owned them to fund the protection of the Christian community. This was first asserted by Charles Martel's son, Carloman, at the Council of Estinnes in 743, held at the urging of Boniface.

We also decide, with the agreement of the servants of God and of the Christian people, because of imminent wars and attacks by other peoples who surround us, to keep for some time, with the indulgence of God, a portion of the properties of the church as precaria¹ owing census, on this condition that, annually, we will return to each church or monastery for each property one solidus, that is to say twelve denarii; in such a way that, if the person to whom the property was given as a precarium should die, the property shall revert to the church, and if, once again, circumstances are such as to compel the prince to order it, let the precarium be renewed and a new contract drawn up. But let extreme care be taken that the churches and monasteries whose property has been granted in precarium are not reduced to poverty and want, but if poverty requires it, let full possession be restored to the church and the house of God.

Questions for Consideration

1. In what ways does this statement reflect both the interests of the church and of the state?
2. What are the risks inherent in such a system?

1. Precarium (precaria, plural): land given in usufruct in return for a symbolic tax which prevents “forgetting” the name of the owner. A system established at the beginning of the eight century for church property given as benefices to royal vassals.

Sources & Suggestions for Further Research

BARRIE BRILL

Further Research

The sources for this period are rather sketchy and few in number. The *Liber Historiae Francorum* was written by an unknown author who was close to the center of power in Neustria. The *Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar* consist of three parts: the first ten chapters are based on the *Liber Historiae Francorum* while the second part (chapters 11-33) covers the period until 751 was written for Count Childebrand, the brother of Charles Martel and then the next twenty chapters covering events down to 768 were written by Count Nibelung, the son of Childebrand. Arguments concerning the authorship of Fredegar Chronicle are numerous to the point of becoming a “cottage industry”. These sources are available in English translations as follows:

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The lives of the pontiffs for this period are found in: Davis, Raymond, *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis)*. Liverpool University Press, 1992.

The Letters of Saint Boniface are also found in English translation in: Emerton, Ephraim, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*. New York: Columbia University of Records of Civilization, 1976; his Vita can be found in: Talbot, C. H., ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954; along with those of Willibrord, Strum etc. His letters were extremely critical of conditions in the Frankish Church that he wanted to reform. Boniface probably darkened the picture in order to support his demands for reform.

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“Battle of Poitiers as viewed by the First Continuator of the Chronicle of Fredegar” *Fredegarii et aliorum chronica*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*. Hanover, 1888.

THE STATE: BYZANTINE STATEHOOD - THE EMPEROR, THE SENATE, AND THE PEOPLE OF ROME

Section Author: Aleksandar Jovanović, University of the Fraser Valley

Learning Objectives

- Explain the interconnections among the people, the elites, and the emperors in the governance of the medieval Christian Roman Empire (known as Byzantium)
- Identify the traits of emperorship and civil administration that are unique to the Byzantine Empire
- Identify the role of the people of Constantinople in imperial elections and other affairs.
- Recognize the transformations in the governing practices of the empire
- Explain how these governing transformations contributed to the empire's longevity

On May 11, 330 CE, Constantine, emperor of the Romans, established a new capital city of the Roman Empire – Constantinople – that had been in existence since Octavian Augustus established the principate in 27 BCE. Constantine was certainly not the first emperor to move the capital city to a place other than Rome, but his transition from the traditional capital to the city on the straits of the Bosphorus had long term consequences on the history of the empire. Originally named New Rome by Constantine, the city was soon after renamed Constantinople in honour of the new capital's founder. However, Constantine's idea to name the city New Rome was a clear sign that this capital was not supposed to be a transitory one, but instead a permanent seat of the Roman Empire. Truly, the city on the Bosphorus remained the centre of the Roman state until its split into Eastern and Western empires in 395 CE and then of the Eastern Roman Empire until May 29, 1453 CE, when the city fell to the Ottoman Turks.

Some scholars have reached a consensus that the foundation of Constantinople marks the beginning of the Byzantine Empire. Others, on the other hand, take the year 395 CE – the split of the Roman Empire into Eastern and Western empires – as the beginning of Byzantium. A few researchers take the year 313 CE, when Constantine officially allowed Christians to worship freely in the empire, as the starting point of Byzantium. You might wonder at this point, why is there no clear consensus about when the Roman Empire stops, and Byzantium begins? The answer to this question is both simple and complex. Simply put, the term Byzantium was never used by the people we refer to as the Byzantines. Rather, they saw themselves as the Romans of the Roman Empire that was in existence from Augustus' reign in the 1st century BCE to Konstantinos XI's death in 1453 CE. The terms Byzantium and Byzantines would then come as a complete surprise to the medieval Romans. Why do we use the term Byzantium then? In short, the term was coined after 1453 by scholars from Western Europe who sought to appropriate the name Roman and associate the Western Roman Empire's legacy exclusively with Western European historical memory. The need to detach Roman history from its medieval rendering was the main reason for finding a new term for the Eastern Roman Empire and its people. In contemporary scholarship, both terms Byzantium and (medieval or Eastern) Roman Empire are in use to designate the Christian Roman Empire, which was centered at Constantinople, and after the 7th century CE, used Greek as its primary language.

Having clarified the naming issue, we can now shift our attention to the questions of continuity and transformations that happened in the governing system of the Roman state from Augustus to Konstantinos XI. As you can imagine, every country,

together with its society, changes over time due to internal and external factors. We can look at Canada over the past 150 years of its existence and the transformations through which the country has gone from being a settler colony of the British Empire to being a liberal multicultural country striving to acknowledge and deal with the burden of its unflattering legacy, much of which was a result of racist legislation and state-organized projects. Now, we can multiply the number 150 by 10 to really get a sense of the longevity of the Roman Empire, the empire which existed for 1500 years. Within these 1500 years, the empire underwent several major societal, political, and cultural transformations: Christianity became the official religion of the empire in the late 4th century CE and, by the mid-7th century, Greek has taken over Latin as the official language of the state – both were in wide use before.

The primary sources available in this section attempt to shed light on both the continuities and transformations of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire by looking at the roles played by emperors, the senate, and the people of the empire in governing the state. Both the senate and the people of Rome were the staples of Roman political culture since the days of the Republic, which ended with Augustus. Ever since Octavian Augustus established himself as the leader of the Roman state, emperors occupied the central role in governing the empire and by the end of the 3rd century CE, the role of the Roman emperors was further strengthened vis-à-vis the empire's elites, many of whom were members of the senate. The legitimacy of the emperors depended on the support of the citizens of the empire, which became widely spread in 212 CE when the emperor Caracalla issued the citizenship law granting Roman citizenship to all the inhabitants of the empire. The role of the inhabitants of the empire's capital city – first Rome, then Constantinople – was particularly important as these people lived in proximity to the emperor and his administration in the palace.

The Byzantine (Roman) Empire is oftentimes associated with expansive bureaucracy, though we should keep in mind that it was quite different from modern states' administration, as one official could jump between positions in a very ad hoc manner: for example, one day a person could be a tax collector, the next he could be a judge. Despite the quick transitions in functions, the empire's bureaucrats were the ones who administered the city of Constantinople, as well as the provinces, and oversaw maintenance of justice throughout the empire and conducted regular censuses to tax people according to their income and property. While the system was far from perfect, it was arguably the most complex one in the wider European and Mediterranean worlds, rivaled only by the Abbasid Caliphate. Unlike the Abbasid Caliphate, though, the Byzantine state endured for over a millennium. Thus, the elites of the empire traditionally gained influence in the state by serving in the civil or military administration. Some civil servants managed to accumulate enough power that they even became emperors.

Speaking of becoming an emperor, let us focus on the issue of succession. The Roman Empire from Augustus to Konstantinos XI never really developed a firm system of succession as Western European dynastic monarchies did. The imperial office was open to anybody who was worthy of it – a very loose definition that caused the Romans many pains at times – and while the crown was sometimes passed from a father to a son or an adoptee, at other times it was passed to a leading member of the armies or civil administration. The imperial office remained open to any man, so much so that an imperial stableboy in the late 9th century succeeded in becoming an emperor, establishing a family that ruled the empire (with some interruptions) for about 150 years. By contrast to the stableboy, a major nobleman in the late 11th century established himself on the throne and managed to tie the majority of the empire's elites to himself through marriage and other alliances; from the 12th century until the end of the empire, members of his wider family and circles continued occupying the imperial office.

As we see, the continuities and transformations of the Byzantine Empire were caused by the very people who lived in it and who belonged to all walks of life. Thanks to the adaptability of its rich legacy, the Byzantine Roman state was to be remembered in contemporary scholarship as “the empire that would not die.”

For more information on the Byzantine Empire, watch [The changing borders of the Byzantine Empire from 395 to 1453](#) and [TedEd Talk: The History of the Byzantine Empire](#).

Questions for Consideration

1. What do the continuities and the changes in the governing system tell us about the longevity of the Byzantine state?
2. Do you think we should use the term Byzantium and Byzantines to denote the empire and its inhabitants even though the people living in the empire self-identified solely as Romans and thought of their state as Roman?

The Roman Mediterranean c. 337 CE

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ



Figure 6.1 The Roman Mediterranean c. 337 Courtesy of Ian Mladjov. Click anywhere on the map to open a larger version.

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- [The Imperial and Senatorial Provinces of the Roman Mediterranean c.337 AD](#) © Ian Mladjov is licensed under a [CC BY \(Attribution\)](#) license

Classical Roman Empire

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ

Octavian Augustus about His Life

The Roman Republic entered a period of prolonged political crisis that lasted for about a hundred years (from 133 to 31 BCE) when, finally, after a century of civil wars and bloodshed, Octavian Augustus defeated Marc Antony, the last of his opponents, and became the undisputed ruler of the Roman state. While Octavian officially reinstated the Roman Republic, in practice, he accumulated the prerogatives of several different public offices of the state in his own hands, which allowed him to rule as a monarch over the empire. Thus, in modern scholarship as much as in the writings of authors flourishing from the 2nd century CE, Augustus is labelled as the first emperor of Rome. One of the reasons behind Augustus' rise was the fact that Rome and its people were tired of constant internal conflict and wished to see peace back in the empire. The governing system of the Roman Republic, though suited for Rome back in the days when it was a mere city-state in Italy, was becoming unsuitable for running a Mediterranean Empire. Thus, Augustus started his reign under the official guise of the Roman Republic but set in motion a series of irreversible changes that were to mark the history of Rome for the next 1500 years.

We have been extremely lucky to know how Augustus wished to be remembered as his propagandistic autobiography has survived to this day. Upon his death, Augustus willed his autobiography to be inscribed on temples of the goddess Roma and of himself around the provinces of the Roman Empire. In Italy and the western provinces, the text was available in Latin and in the eastern provinces a Greek version was added to the inscriptions to make the piece more comprehensible to the local populaces. Thus, the first text in history of Rome that was made available throughout the empire with the same content was delivered in both Latin and Greek, a practice that Roman emperors continued in the eastern provinces, and then in the Eastern Roman Empire, all the way until the 7th century CE, when Greek took over as the sole official language of the state. Augustus, then, laid the foundations of the new governing system of Rome, which was to outlive him by over a millennium.

Res Gestae Divi Augusti

In my twentieth year [44 BCE], acting on my own initiative and at my own charges, I raised an army wherewith I brought again liberty to the Republic oppressed by the dominance of a faction. Therefore did the Senate admit me to its own order by honorary decrees, in the consulship of Gaius Pansa and Aulus Hirtius. At the same time they gave unto me rank among the consulars in the expressing of my opinion [in the Senate]; and they gave unto me the imperium. It also voted that I, as propraetor, together with the consuls, should "see to it that the state suffered no harm." In the same year, too, when both consuls had fallen in battle, the people made me consul and triumvir for the re-establishing of the Republic.

The men who killed my father¹ I drove into exile by strictly judicial process, and then, when they took up arms against the Republic, twice I overcame them in battle.

I undertook civil and foreign wars both by land and by sea; as victor therein I showed mercy to all surviving [Roman] citizens. Foreign nations, that I could safely pardon, I preferred to spare rather than to destroy. About 500,000 Roman citizens took the military oath of allegiance to me. Rather over 300,000 of these have I settled in colonies, or sent back to their home towns (municipia) when their term of service ran out; and to all of these I have given lands bought by me, or the money for farms—and this out of my private means. I have taken 600 ships, besides those smaller than triremes.

Twice have I had the lesser triumph [i.e., the ovation]; thrice the [full] curule triumph; twenty-one times have I been saluted as “Imperator.” After that, when the Senate voted me many triumphs, I declined them. Also I often deposited the laurels in the Capitol, fulfilling the vows which I had made in battle. On account of the enterprises brought to a happy issue on land and sea by me, or by my legates, under my auspices, fifty-five times has the Senate decreed a thanksgiving unto the Immortal Gods. The number of days, too, on which thanksgiving was professed, fulfilling the Senate’s decrees, was 890. Nine kings, or children of kings, have been led before my car in my triumphs. And when I wrote these words, thirteen times had I been consul, and for the thirty-seventh year was holding the tribunician power.

The dictatorship which was offered me by the People and by the Senate, both when I was present and when I was absent, I did not accept. The annual and perpetual consulship I did not accept. Ten years in succession I was one of the “triumvirs for the reestablishing of the Republic.” Up to the day that I wrote these words I have been princeps of the Senate forty years. I have been pontifex maximus, augur, member of the “College of Fifteen for the Sacred Rites” [and of the other religious brotherhoods].

In my fifth consulship, by order of the People and the Senate, I increased the number of patricians. Three times I revised the Senate list. In my sixth consulship, with my colleague, Marcus Agrippa, I made a census of the People. [By it] the number of Roman citizens was 4,063,000. Again in the consulship of Gaius Censorinus and Gaius Asinus [8 BCE] I [took the census, when] the number of Roman citizens was 4,230,000. A third time . . . in the consulship of Sextus Pompeius and Sextus Appuleius [14 CE], with Tiberius Caesar as colleague, I [took the census when] the number of Roman citizens was 4,937,000. By new legislation I have restored many customs of our ancestors which had begun to fall into disuse, and I have myself also set many examples worthy of imitation by those to follow me.

By decree of the Senate my name has been included in the hymn of the Salii [Davis: as if Augustus were a god], and it has been enacted by law that as long as I live, I shall be invested with the tribunician power. I refused to be pontifex maximus in place of a colleague still living, when the people proffered me [that] priesthood which my father had held.

[The temple of] Janus Quirinus, which it was the purpose of our fathers to close when there was a victorious peace throughout the whole Roman Empire—by land and sea—and which—before my birth—had been alleged to have been closed only twice at all, since Rome was founded: thrice did the Senate order it closed while I was princeps.

To each of the Roman plebs I paid 300 sesterces² in accord with the last will of my father [Caesar]. In

1. Arkenberg: Julius Caesar, who adopted his nephew as his son in his will

2. Arkenberg: about \$172 in 1998 dollars

my own name in my fifth consulship [29 BCE] I gave 400 sesterces³ from the spoils of war. Again in my tenth consulship [24 BCE] I gave from my own estate to every man [among the Romans] 400 sesterces as a donative. In my eleventh, twelve times I made distributions of food, buying grain at my own charges. And I made like gifts on several other occasions. The sum which I spent for Italian farms [for the veterans] was about 600,000,000 sesterces⁴ and for lands in the provinces about 260,000,000⁵ Four times have I aided the public treasury from my own means, to such extent that I furnished to those managing the treasury department 150,000,000 sesterces⁶.

I built the Curia [Senate House], and the Chalcidicum adjacent thereunto, the temple of Apollo on the Palatine with its porticoes, the temple of the deified Julius [Caesar], the Lupercal, the portico to the Circus of Flaminius [and a vast number of other public buildings and temples].

Aqueducts which have crumbled through age I have restored, and I have doubled the water [in the aqueduct] called the Marcian by turning a new stream into its course. The Forum Julium and the basilica which was between the temple of Castor and the temple of Saturn, works begun and almost completed by my father, I finished.

Three times in my own name and five times in that of my [adoptive] sons or my grandsons I have given gladiator exhibitions; in these exhibitions about 10,000 men have fought. [Besides other games] twenty-six times in my own name, or in that of my sons and grandsons I have given hunts of African wild beasts in the circus, the Forum, the amphitheaters—and about 3500 wild beasts have been slain.

I gave the people the spectacle of a naval battle beyond the Tiber where is now the grove of the Caesars. For this purpose an excavation was made 1800 feet long and 1200 wide. In this contest thirty warships—triremes or biremes—took part, and many others smaller. About 3000 men fought on these craft beside the rowers.

I have cleared the sea from pirates. In that war with the slaves I delivered to their masters for punishment 30,000 slaves who had fled their masters and taken up arms against the Republic. The provinces of Gaul, Spain, Africa, Sicily, and Sardinia swore the same allegiance to me. I have extended the boundaries of all the provinces of the Roman People which were bordered by nations not yet subjected to our sway. My fleet has navigated the ocean from the mouth of the Rhine as far as the boundaries of the Cimbri where aforetime no Roman had ever penetrated by land or by sea. The German peoples there sent their legates, seeking my friendship, and that of the Roman people. At almost the same time, by my command and under my auspices two armies have been led into Ethiopia and into Arabia, which is called Felix [“The Happy”] and very many of the enemy of both peoples have fallen in battle, and many towns have been captured.

I added Egypt to the Empire of the Roman People. When the king of Greater Armenia was killed I could have made that country a province, but I preferred after the manner of our fathers to deliver the kingdom to Tigranes [a vassal prince] ... I have compelled the Parthians to give up to me the spoils and standards of three Roman armies, and as suppliants to seek the friendship of the Roman people. Those [recovered] standards, moreover, I have deposited in the sanctuary located in the temple of Mars the Avenger.

In my sixth and seventh consulships [28 and 27 BCE] when I had put an end to the civil wars, after having

3. Arkenberg: about \$229 in 1998 dollars

4. Arkenberg: about \$200,000,000 in 1998 dollars

5. Arkenberg: about \$158,600,000 in 1998 dollars

6. Arkenberg: about \$86,000,000 in 1998 dollars

obtained complete control of the government, by universal consent I transferred the Republic from my own dominion back to the authority of the Senate and Roman People. In return for this favor by me, I received by decree of the Senate the title Augustus, the doorposts of my house were publicly decked with laurels, a civic crown was fixed above my door, and in the Julian Curia [Senate-house] was set a golden shield, which by its inscription bore witness that it was bestowed on me, by the Senate and Roman People, on account of my valor, clemency, justice, and piety. After that time, I excelled all others in dignity, but of power I held no more than those who were my colleagues in any magistracy.

[A kind of supplement to the inscription adds]: The sum of money which he gave into the treasury or to the Roman People or discharged soldiers was 600,000,000 denarii⁷ [and names many other public works].

Questions for Consideration

1. How does Augustus represent his power and his position in the Roman Republic?
2. Does Augustus talk only about the people in the city of Rome, or does he refer to the inhabitants of provinces as well? Why does he feel the need to communicate with the people throughout the empire?
3. What changes can we see in governing practices of Augustus and how does he try to justify them by using the political jargon of the Roman Republic?

7. Arkenberg: about \$1,372,000,000 in 1998 dollars

Early Byzantine Period (330–717)

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ

Christianization of the Empire, Romanization of Christianity

From the times of Augustus to Constantine the Great, the Roman Empire has undergone a series of changes that the leaders of the state always justified by fitting them into the existing Roman laws and regulations--which at times had to be modified. Arguably one of the greatest official changes in the empire was introduced by emperor Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* issued in 212 CE; this law granted Roman citizenship to virtually all free men and women of the empire, thus terminating the city of Rome's special position in the Mediterranean. However, this law had long reaching consequences, as in Roman legal tradition it was the people who had to acclaim the new emperor. Now, the people included all the free inhabitants of the Roman Empire and, thus, the armies manned with Roman citizens started proclaiming their own emperors. This period of multiple emperors being acclaimed in military camps is known as the Crisis of the Third Century. The crisis and bloodshed ended with Diocletian becoming emperor in 284 CE and commencing a series of reforms to enlarge and centralize the country's administration, as well as to split power between four official co-emperors.

While Diocletian's idea of four co-emperors did not live long, the major administrative and fiscal reforms started under him continued with Constantine the Great, who became the sole emperor in 324 CE. Other than continuing Diocletian's reforms of the administration by splitting the military and civil administration and by breaking down the traditional senatorial groups at the expense of equestrians, Constantine changed the previous policies towards the Christians in the empire. Traditionally, Christians--originating from the eastern provinces of the empire--were persecuted by the state (see the section on Christian martyrs). By the time of Constantine's reign, the religion has spread around the empire and the emperor sought to recognize the Christians' right to worship their god and practice their religion freely. A major law was issued in 313 CE by Constantine granting Christians the right of free worship. Constantine, however, did not stop at recognizing the Christians, but he himself became invested in the institutional organization of the empire's church. We can say then that Constantine started the process of Christianization of the Roman Empire, as well as the Romanization of Christianity, which reached its apex at the end of the 4th century when Theodosius I made Christianity the sole official religion of the Roman Empire. In under a century, Christianity went from being outlawed to being the official and only allowed religion of the Roman Empire.

Edict of Milan (313 CE)

When I, Constantine Augustus, as well as I Licinius Augustus d fortunately met near Mediolanurn (Milan), and were considering everything that pertained to the public welfare and security, we thought -, among other things which we saw would be for the good of many, those regulations pertaining to the reverence of the Divinity ought certainly to be made first, so that we might grant to the Christians and others full authority to observe that religion which each preferred; whence any Divinity whatsoever in the seat of the heavens may be propitious and kindly disposed to us and all who are placed under our rule And thus by this wholesome counsel and most upright provision we thought to arrange that no one whatsoever should be denied the

opportunity to give his heart to the observance of the Christian religion, of that religion which he should think best for himself, so that the Supreme Deity, to whose worship we freely yield our hearts) may show in all things His usual favor and benevolence. Therefore, your Worship should know that it has pleased us to remove all conditions whatsoever, which were in the rescripts formerly given to you officially, concerning the Christians and now any one of these who wishes to observe Christian religion may do so freely and openly, without molestation. We thought it fit to commend these things most fully to your care that you may know that we have given to those Christians free and unrestricted opportunity of religious worship. When you see that this has been granted to them by us, your Worship will know that we have also conceded to other religions the right of open and free observance of their worship for the sake of the peace of our times, that each one may have the free opportunity to worship as he pleases; this regulation is made so that we may not seem to detract from any dignity or any religion.

Moreover, in the case of the Christians especially we esteemed it best to order that if it happens anyone heretofore has bought from our treasury from anyone whatsoever, those places where they were previously accustomed to assemble, concerning which a certain decree had been made and a letter sent to you officially, the same shall be restored to the Christians without payment or any claim of recompense and without any kind of fraud or deception. Those, moreover, who have obtained the same by gift, are likewise to return them at once to the Christians. Besides, both those who have purchased and those who have secured them by gift, are to appeal to the vicar if they seek any recompense from our bounty, that they may be cared for through our clemency. All this property ought to be delivered at once to the community of the Christians through your intercession, and without delay. And since these Christians are known to have possessed not only those places in which they were accustomed to assemble, but also other property, namely the churches, belonging to them as a corporation and not as individuals, all these things which we have included under the above law, you will order to be restored, without any hesitation or controversy at all, to these Christians, that is to say to the corporations and their conventicles: providing, of course, that the above arrangements be followed so that those who return the same without payment, as we have said, may hope for an indemnity from our bounty. In all these circumstances you ought to tender your most efficacious intervention to the community of the Christians, that our command may be carried into effect as quickly as possible, whereby, moreover, through our clemency, public order may be secured. Let this be done so that, as we have said above, Divine favor towards us, which, under the most important circumstances we have already experienced, may, for all time, preserve and prosper our successes together with the good of the state. Moreover, in order that the statement of this decree of our good will may come to the notice of all, this rescript, published by your decree, shall be announced everywhere and brought to the knowledge of all, so that the decree of this, our benevolence, cannot be concealed.

Theodosius I's Prohibition of Pagan Religions

Theodosian Code XVI.1.2

It is our desire that all the various nation which are subject to our clemency and moderation, should

continue to the profession of that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it has been preserved by faithful tradition and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe in the one deity of the father, Son and Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity. We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title Catholic Christians; but as for the others, since in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics and shall not presume to give their conventicles the name of churches. They will suffer in the first place the chastisement of divine condemnation and the second the punishment of our authority, in accordance with the will of heaven shall decide to inflict.

Questions for Consideration

1. How does Constantine justify his decision to allow Christians to worship freely in the empire?
2. How does Theodosius I justify his decision to prohibit non-Christian worship in the empire?
3. How do both emperors use the language of the Roman state to formalize their decisions revolving around religious issues?

Middle Byzantine Period (717-1071)

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ

Byzantine Officials on the Emperors and the People of Rome

The Roman Empire was split into two independent states: Western and Eastern Roman Empires, the latter of which was governed from Constantinople. The Western Roman state succumbed to Germanic and other groups in 476 CE that, through a series of violent and peaceful migrations, established their independent states in the lands of the empire. The Eastern Roman Empire survived for another thousand years, continuing the legacy of Classical Roman institutions that legitimized the imperial office through the maintenance of public consensus, especially in the capital city of Constantinople and in the armies. However, with the rise of the Islamic empires of the Umayyads and the Abbasids, the Romans lost much of their territory in West Asia and North Africa; the core of the empire became Asia Minor, as well as the European regions of Thrace and Greece, while the northern part of the Balkan Peninsula was lost over the course of the 6th and 7th centuries to the Slavs and Bulgarians who established their own state formations there.

The loss of territories, as well as the need to wage wars on two fronts so close to Constantinople, came as a shock to the Romans, who had to restructure their administration by merging civilian and military rule in single offices held by public servants. The period from the early 8th to the late 9th centuries also saw some soul-searching done by the prominent generals of the eastern armies, some of whom became the emperors of the Romans with the support of their troops and the people of Constantinople. These emperors continued to practice their imperial prerogatives and interfere with the affairs of the church. Their ideas about the ways in which worship should be done, however, found opposition with many church officials and the conflict within the church dominated the empire's religious landscape for about two centuries. This period of theological dispute over whether icons should be worshiped or considered idolatry brought about the rise of the first woman who held the position of emperor of the Romans. The excerpt from Theophanes' Chronicle addresses the rise and fall of empresses Irene, who blinded her own son in order to continue to rule the empire, which she had already ruled as a regent during her son's minority.

After the crisis caused by the banishment of icons (iconoclasm), the empire entered a period of economic and territorial expansion in the 10th and 11th centuries, which also brought about the rise of urban communities throughout the empire, as well as a noticeable population growth in Constantinople. The changes caused by these expansions led to the growth of bureaucracy in the capital, as well as in the provinces, and service in the imperial government became the best way for one's family to ennoble themselves. Thus, unlike in Western Europe where hereditary nobility was well-entrenched by this point, the Byzantine elites were comprised of the people who could afford to obtain high education and then procure careers in civil and military service of the emperors. Granted, a lot of these families tended to pass their education and positions to their own offspring. In this century of growth, a judge by the name of Michael Attaleiates, a major official, wrote the historical account of the 11th century, focusing on the role of the emperors and the people of Constantinople in their reigns. In the excerpt provided here, we see how Attaleiates explained the rise and fall of emperor Michael IV, who was an adoptive son of empress Zoe, who herself was an offspring of the beloved family that ruled the empire since the times of Basil I, who started his career as a mere stableboy to the emperor.

Irene of Athens: The First Woman to Rule Byzantium

From Theophanes, *The Chronicle*

ANNUS MUNDI 6282 (SEPTEMBER 1, 789— AUGUST 31, 790)

In this year, out of envy of the rulers' piety, the devil incited wicked men to engage the mother against her son and the son against his mother. As if from foreknowledge, they persuaded her, "It is not ordained that your son should rule the state if you do not, as God gave it to you," and were fully believed. Since Irene was a woman (and was also power-hungry) she was deceived, and felt assured this was so. She did not reckon that they had used it as a pretext because they wanted to manage affairs themselves.

The Emperor was twenty years old, strong and competent, but saw he had no power. He was dismayed when he saw the patrician and logothete Staurakios occupied with everything. Everyone went to Staurakios, and no-one dared visit the Emperor. Constantine plotted with his own few intimates and with the magistros Peter and the patricians Theodore Kamoulianos and Damianos; they decided to seize Staurakios and exile him to Sicily. Constantine himself would hold power with his mother.

On February 9 of the thirteenth indiction there was a terrifying earthquake, so that some people did not dare sleep indoors, but passed their time in orchards and open-air tents.

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ANNUS MUNDI 6290 (SEPTEMBER 1, 797— AUGUST 31, 798)

In this year, as soon as she had taken power, Irene immediately sent Dorotheos the abbot of Chrysopolis and Constantine the chartophylax of the great church to Abu Malik, who was devastating Kappadokia and Galatia. She sent them out to negotiate for peace, but it did not come to pass.

In October some rebels went to the imprisoned sons of God's enemy Constantine at the monastery of Therapeia. These men persuaded them to flee to the great church and ask for a firm promise that they would not be harmed. Using this as a pretext, the rebels would then acclaim one of them Emperor. When many people had assembled in the church, the eunuch patrician Aetios came in to lead them out for their pledge (which no-one furnished them), but then exiled them to Athens. The two patricians Staurakios and Aetios, who were intimates of the Empress, became enemies and openly revealed their hatred. Each of them had plans to procure the Empire for his own relatives after Irene's death.

ANNUS MUNDI 6291 (SEPTEMBER 1, 798— AUGUST 31, 799)

In this year Abu Malik attacked Romania; he sent out a raiding party of light-armed troops, who advanced as far as Malagina. When he reached Staurakios' stables, he took the patrician's horses and the imperial equipage, then withdrew unharmed. The rest of his men advanced all the way to Lydia, taking many prisoners. Another one of their raiding-parties on a sally descended on the patrician Paul the count of the Opsikion, his entire thematic army, and the optimatoi; it caused them many casualties, and even took their baggage-train before withdrawing.

In March of the seventh indiction Akameros (the ruler of the 474 Sklavinoi of Belzetia), spurred on by the troops of the theme of Hellas, wanted to bring forth the sons of Constantine and choose one of them Emperor. When the Empress Irene learned this, she sent to the patrician Constantine Serantopekhos his son

the spatharios Theophylaktos, who was also her nephew. She blinded all her opponents and broke up the plot against her.

On the second day of holy Easter the Empress left the church of the Holy Apostles borne on a golden chariot drawn by four white horses and controlled by four patricians: I mean, Bardanes the general of the Thrakesian theme, Sisinnios general of Thrace, Niketas the domesticus of the scholae, and Constantine Bo'ilas. She distributed abundant consular largess.

In May the Empress believed she was near death. The eunuchs' strife increased. Aetios took as a partner the patrician Niketas the domesticus of the scholae; the two of them attacked Staurakios, persuading the Empress that he was aiming at the rule. Incensed at him, she attacked him in the palace of Hierion, saying he was planning riots and insurrections, and that he was the means of his own swiftest destruction. He defended himself to her and gained his safety, but waxed furious at the patricians Aetios and Niketas.

ANNUS MUNDI 6292 (SEPTEMBER 1, 799— AUGUST 31, 800)

In this year — the eighth indiction — in February Staurakios devised a revolt and insurrection in the imperial city. He had pledged money and gifts for the scholarii and excubitores there, as well as for their officers. The pious Irene convened a silentium in the triklinos of Justinian and kept all the military units from approaching Staurakios. His heart failed; he brought up through his mouth foaming blood from his 475 chest and lungs. Observing this, his doctors declared it a mortal sign. But until the very day of his death, which was June 3 of the eighth indiction, the rest of his hangers-on and fools convinced him with oaths that he would yet live and rule. With them he devised and drove home a rising in Kappadokia against Aetios, but was not deemed worthy to hear about it while living, for the news of it arrived two days after his death. The rebels were quelled and subjected to exile and punishment.

ANNUS MUNDI 6293 (SEPTEMBER 1, 800— AUGUST 31, 801)

In this year — the ninth indiction — on December 25 Charles the king of the Franks was crowned by pope Leo. He wished to marshal an expedition against Sicily, but desisted, wanting instead to marry Irene. In the following year — the tenth indiction — he dispatched ambassadors to gain that end.

In March of the ninth indiction the pious Irene forgave the Byzantines the city taxes, and lightened the "commercia" at Abydos and Hieron. These and many other benefactions earned her great thanks.

ANNUS MUNDI 6294 (SEPTEMBER 1, 801— AUGUST 31, 802)

In this year the patrician Aetios, free of Staurakios, planned to gain power, eager to transfer it to his brother, whom he appointed chief general in both Thrace and Macedonia. He himself controlled the thematic armies of the other shore: the troops from the Anatolic theme and that of the Opsikion. Full of excitement, he paid little attention to the important officers, taking none of them into account. But they were extremely disturbed about him, and planned and carried out a revolt against the Empress.

ANNUS MUNDI 6295 (SEPTEMBER 1, 802— AUGUST 31, 803)

In this year — the eleventh indiction — on October 31 at the fourth hour of the night, while Monday was drawing toward dawn, Nikephoros the patrician and minister of public finances rebelled against the pious Irene. By His ineffable judgment, God acquiesced in this because of the multitude of our sins. The treacherous, oathbreaking Triphyllioi — the patrician and domesticus of the scholae Niketas and his brother the patrician Sisinnios — worked with Nikephoros. Also with them were the patrician Leo Serantopekhos, the patrician Gregory son of Mousoulakios, Theoktistos the patrician and quaestor, and the patrician Peter; they also beguiled some of the officers of the imperial guards.

When they came to the Bronze Gate, all at once they tricked the guards, whom they falsely convinced that Irene had sent them to proclaim Nikephoros Emperor because Aetios was going to force her to name his brother Leo Emperor. The guards swallowed this huge lie, and acclaimed the tyrant as Emperor. This is how these patricians went to the great palace and got inside. From there they sent obscure men and slaves all through the city to make the acclamation. They also surrounded with guards the monastery of Eleutherios, where Irene happened to be.

At dawn they summoned Irene and imprisoned her in the great palace. Then they went on to the great church to crown the sinner. All the city masses went with them but, because of what had been done, everyone was upset and unable to stand the crowner, the man who was crowned, or those who rejoiced with them. Those who had spent their lives in piety and reason marveled at the divine judgment: that He had allowed her (who had struggled for the true faith in martyr's fashion) to be ousted by a swineherd because her friends joined him out of love of money (I mean the eunuch patrician Leo the sakellarios of Sinope, the God-detested Triphyllioi, and the patricians mentioned above). She had enriched them with huge gifts and often had eaten with them. By flattery and oaths they had persuaded her to believe their good will towards her was more compelling than all the world's terrible affairs.

As if beside themselves, others could not grasp the reality of what had happened, and thought they were dreaming. Still others, knowing full well what was toward, blessed the good days which had passed and mourned the misfortune which, because of the tyrant, would come in the future. This was especially true of members of his wicked party, who had formerly favored everything he did. A common, unsummoned gloom and depression settled on everyone, so that I would be tedious were I to prolong the story, and will not write bit by bit the graceless account of this pitiful day. The weather was quite unnaturally sullen, dark, and persistently chilly during autumn, which clearly fore shadowed Nikephoros' future intractability and impatience, especially to those who had chosen him.

On the next day he went with some patricians to the imprisoned Empress. As he usually did, he falsely played the role of an honest man, by which means he had tricked the masses. His justification of himself to her was that he had been elevated to the rule against his will and had no appetite for it, but had been raised by men who had advanced him and betrayed her, just as the betrayer Judas had treated the Lord after the Last Supper. He bore witness that they imitated Judas in every respect.

He secretly showed her that, contrary to imperial custom, he was wearing black sandals, and maintained that he was pleased to do so. With oaths he treacherously encouraged her to enjoy the total tranquility an Empress, as opposed to a slave, needed, and to believe there would be no disaster because she had been ousted.

He advised her not to hide the imperial treasures from him, and condemned the disease of avarice although he could not bear to control it. For this terribly afflicted the devourer of everything, who placed all his hopes in gold. The wise and God-loving Irene, although liable to be affected by her sudden change of status (as she was a woman), spoke with noble and intelligent purpose to the man who was yesterday an oathbreaking slave, but today a villainous revolutionary and reckless tyrant: "I, sirrah, believe in God, Who, though formerly I was an orphan, raised and elevated me to the throne, although I am unworthy. I blame my destruction on my sins. I have always urged in every way the acclamation of the name of the Lord, the only Emperor of Emperors and Lord of Lords. Since I believe nothing comes to pass without Him, I yield to the Lord the means of your advancement. You are not ignorant of the reports against you which were brought to me. They concerned the office you now possess, and were true, as the outcome of this affair reveals. If I had gone along with them, these reports would have had you executed without hindrance. But I was convinced by your oaths; I

had mercy on you, and misled many men who meant me well, of God, through Whom Emperors reign and dynasts rule the world, I give back what was once mine. Now I give you reverence as Emperor, as you are pious and have been chosen by Him. I implore you to have mercy on my weakness and suffer me to keep the monastery of Eleutherios (which I built) to guide my soul from its incomparable misfortune.”

He said, If this is what you want for yourself, swear to me on the divine power that you will not hide any of the Empire’s treasures, and I will fulfill your request and furnish you with all aid and tranquility.”

On the precious and lifegiving wood she swore to him, “I will not hide anything from you, not even an obol.” This she carried out. But once he had gained what he longed for, he immediately exiled her to the nunnery she had built on the Prince’s Island.

Once he had seized power, this devourer of everything could not even briefly conceal by hypocrisy his innate evil and avarice. Rather, he established his own wicked, unjust court at Magnaura, on the pre- text of removing injustice. But, as events showed, the tyrant’s aim was not to give the poor justice, but through his court to dishonor and capture all the men in power and transfer to himself control of all affairs.

He saw that everyone was dismayed at him, and grew fearful lest they should perchance recall the pious Irene’s benefactions and summon her to rule once more. In November, after winter was firmly entrenched, the heartless man, taking no pity on her, exiled her to Lesbos. He ordered her securely imprisoned and, in general, seen by no-one.

On April 30 Niketas Triphyllios died, killed (as they say) by Nikephoros’ poison.

On Thursday, May 4, Nikephoros went to the suburb of Chalcedon. Though he was mounted on a well-trained, gentle horse, by divine providence it threw him, crushing his right foot.

At the first hour of Wednesday, July 18, Bardanes (surnamed 1 ourkos), the patrician and general of the theme of the Anatolies, was proclaimed Emperor by the thematic troops of the opposite shore. But although he harangued them at some length, he could not make them cross. He went to Chrysopolis and besieged it for eight days; when the city did not accept him, he withdrew to Malagina. He feared God and did not think he should be responsible for the slaughter of Christians, so he sent a message to Nikephoros and received a written guarantee from the Emperor’s own hand that he and all his men would not be harmed or liable to any penalty. The holy patriarch Tarasios and all the patricians also subscribed to it..

At midnight on September 8 Bardanes secretly ran away to the monastery of Herakleios in Bithynian Kios. He found one of the Emperor’s warships which had been left behind, was tonsured, and assumed monastic garb. He boarded the ship and traveled to the island called Prote (on which was a monastery he had built), thinking Nikephoros would respect the fearful pledge he had given him, and would not harm him. But Nikephoros first divested him of his property, then found an excuse to arrest all the officers and property owners of the themes, as well as some from the imperial city. He let the whole army go unpaid. What tale could one tell worthy of the deeds he did at that time? They opposed God, but were permitted because of our sins.

On August 9 of the eleventh indiction the Empress Irene died in her exile at Lesbos. Her body was moved to the nunnery she had built on the Prince’s Island.

Michael Attaleiates on the Rise and Fall of Michael IV Kalaphates

The History

The wife of this emperor, the empress Zoe, returned to the palace that is situated south of the more northerly regions of the City, for the emperor had been buried there, by the monastery of the Holy Anargyroi. An assembly was convened in the Great City, as happens whenever there is a change in the regime, and not long afterward Michael, the nephew of the recently departed emperor, was proclaimed emperor, who for many years had held the rank of **kaisar**.

He was then adopted by the empress and swore fearsome oaths affirming that he would never break faith with her, or so he claimed, and these were confirmed not with ink but with the undefiled blood of the theanthropic Word and using the hand of the greatest man born of women, the Baptist.

In the past, he was maligned for his previous conduct and for not associating with men who had conducted themselves in a praiseworthy way. But when he was elevated to the imperial position he was praised greatly and solemnly exalted, since he now began to grant more honor to the Senate and his other subjects than any previous emperor, rewarding a vast number of them with illustrious rariks and honors. More than anyone he also made an effort to restore lawful government, and he presented himself as the inexorable avenger of the victims of injustice and as honoring and preferring justice above all else.

He freed that famous man, Konstantinos Dalassenos, from his imprisonment of many years -he had been confined to a tower by the emperor's uncle on the suspicion of plotting to seize the throne – as well as that well-known patrikios Georgios Maniakes, whom he honored with the rank of magistros and appointed katepano of Italy. But his own relatives, who were many and rich but also seemed burdensome because of their overbearing deeds, he wholly removed from the scene. Their leader, the monk and orphanotrophos Ioannes, who had governed the state as deputy emperor, he condemned to everlasting exile, while the rest, whether they were grown men with a blooming beard or just adolescents, he had castrated. In this way he destroyed his family, which intelligent men saw as mindless zeal, for it deprived him of the crucial support of his relatives.

On the day of the divine festival of the supernatural Resurrection of Christ our God, which is celebrated by the entire populace and known to the Orthodox as the salvific Easter, the superintendents of the marketplace made ready for the imperial procession by covering the road with luxuriously woven silk cloths all the way from the palace itself to the gates of the revered and great church of the Holy Wisdom of the Word of God. They made these preparations diligently so that the emperor, surrounded by his stately retinue, could walk across in this way. After this, the procession takes place on horseback from the point where it reaches the New Church, and here they spread out the most luxurious and expensive fabrics while other glittering gold and silver ornaments were affixed along the full length of the route. The entire forum was garlanded and, as if it too were celebrating, shone with joyful thanksgiving for salvation. The procession was truly wondrous and befitting an emperor, and the City resounded everywhere and was exalted with acclamations, thanksgiving, and songs of praise with one exception, namely that the procession took place earlier than was customary, which caused concern among more intelligent onlookers. They noticed that the emperor gave the signal to

start before the scene was fully set and the streets were full, and this untimeliness was not regarded as a good omen. In the meantime, the emperor returned to the palace from the great church of the Holy Apostles, proud of the approbation and attendance that he had received, while the empress was made to dress in black, shorn of her hair, and transported toward evening to Prinkipos, an island not far from the Reigning City.

On the next day, when most people were still unaware of that dramatic turn of events, there was much excited discussion about the previous day. One man said that he had been most impressed with this, another with that, and a third jumped in to praise something that the others left out; in short, everyone wanted to exalt greatly what they had seen. But when the evil fate of the empress became known to the populace and the news spread everywhere, you could see everyone's mood instantly change to its opposite: sullenness rose up against joyful thanksgiving and an outbreak of implacable hatred took the place of the honor and praise that they had bestowed upon the emperor. People strove to surpass each other in their anger and express their displeasure and lack of respect for him.

When the emperor learned about this he wanted to quell the outrage of the Byzantines. He wrote up some document to be read aloud to them from the most conspicuous part of the forum, laying all the blame on the victim: it was she who had started the trouble and it was he who had valorously suppressed the plan. He proffered a fabricated account of a plot against his own life in order to distract the aggrieved people and evade the danger that he suspected was upon him, but he did not realize that by dodging the smoke he would fall into the fire. As the imperial missive was unrolled, a great crowd poured into the area of the proclamation. Yet the herald had not made it to the second word before the multitude began to heave and swell like a stormy sea. First one man, before the rest, yelled out an insult and, along with it, threw a rock. And then the multitude that was crowding that place took up this citizen's lead, as though he were their general, and shouted the same abusive term. Those present rushed against the eparchos roaring and yelling, full of anger and wrath. After smashing up the merchants' stands, they used the pieces as weapons to fight hand-to-hand against the imperial guardsmen and the men of the eparchos. Routing them utterly and forcing them to shameful flight, they did not disperse, as usually happens to a mixed crowd that lacks a leader, but as though they were led from on high they became ever stronger and bolder in their resolution, especially as their numbers were swelling by the hour from those who poured in to join them.

Their leading objective was neither to yield nor to show weakness nor to suffer any delay, but to depose from power that ungrateful and unfeeling man who had turned against his own benefactress and violated the most fearsome oaths, on the grounds that he was guilty and unworthy of his office. A voice was then heard distinctly inciting them to do just that. Some of them broke open the prisons and freed the prisoners from their bonds, making them participants in the uprising and the vengeance to which their spontaneous urges incited them, while others moved on the palace, thereby kindling a civil war. Others surrounded the houses of the emperor's relatives who held great power at that moment, stormed them, destroyed them, and emptied out the riches stored inside, the fruits of much injustice and the groans of the poor. Nor did they respect either churches or monasteries that his relatives had built luxuriously and at great expense, but they likewise plundered, defiled, and stripped them bare as if they were polluted. A third group poured into the sanctuary of the Holy Wisdom of the Word of God, brought down the patriarch himself in his sacerdotal stole, and compelled him not to remain indifferent to the empress, the heir to the throne who was suffering the worst injustice at the hands of that interloper and whose reward for her greatest benefaction was a foul outrage. They thus obtained the support of this most holy man for their just cause. He was Alexios, who had formerly practiced the monastic life to perfection. On the advice of certain officeholders, they also brought back the suffering empress's sister, whose name was Theodora, from one of the monasteries in the Petron

region, where she had lived an essentially sequestered life for many years. They persuaded her to set aside her feminine modesty and weakness and follow them, for they were prepared and determined to suffer anything readily and risk their lives for her and her sister in order to rid them once and for all from the fear and danger posed by their enemy.

So Theodora mounted a horse and was surrounded by a splendid and heavily armed escort of formidable guards; securing the roads in advance, she proceeded directly through the City, acclaimed by the entire population and encouraged not to abandon the struggle and to topple the usurper. Late at night she safely reached the famous holy church and went up to the patriarch's chambers. She turned her eyes to the crowd assembled in the church and they again exhorted her to stand firm. Thus she passed the night. Swiftly summoning all the magistrates and stripping her imperial opponent of all authority; she appointed men to the highest offices and to the supervision of the market. She thus capably took on the governance of the empire.

At dawn courageous military men assaulted the palace with a rain of arrows, and their shouts were accompanied by the blaring of trumpets and bugles. The force of the uproar struck the emperor like a typhoon and he fled the palace by sea as a fugitive to the monastery of Stoudios, where he sought refuge in the sanctuary, hoping that he would suffer no harm and pay no penalty for his unholy deed. But Justice did not long postpone his punishment. His pursuers entered the sanctuary, all of them bellowing, and dragged him out by force. They loaded him onto a pitiful and wretched mule, an object of ridicule. When he reached the Sigma, an order arrived from the Augusta that he be blinded immediately, as well as his father's brother, the nohellisimos. For he was with him as both his adviser and accomplice, and now would share in his miserable fate. So they were pulled down from their mules in a disgraceful way, and with everyone looking on, the pupils of their eyes were punctured with needles. In this way they lost their sight along with the imperial power, and were delivered over to become monks. Let their dismal tale be remembered by posterity and may it set upon a better path anyone who intends to be ungrateful to his benefactors. This Michael, then, reigned for only five months.

Questions for Consideration

1. How does Theophanes depict empress Irene? Does he have a positive, negative, or neutral depiction of her?
2. How is Irene's generosity to the people described and why does this matter for the historical account?
3. What was the role of the people in the rise and fall of Michael IV according to Attaleiates? What about the role of the empire's nobles? How did they contribute to the rise and fall of this emperor?
4. Why did Michael IV feel comfortable enough to dispatch empress Zoe to a monastery on an island outside Constantinople? What was the mistake in his calculation of the public consensus?

The Komnenoi (1071-1204)

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ

The Roman Empire as Alexios I Komnenos' Family Affair

In 1071 the Romans lost their last stronghold in Italy to the Norman settlers and a major part of Asia Minor to the Seljuk Turks. These losses came as a shock once more to the Romans that had to deal with the lessened state, interrupted tax collection, and a series of refugees fleeing the Normans and Seljuk Turks. The crisis lasted for a good ten years until a young nobleman by the name of Alexios I Komnenos took the reins of the state in his hands and, after repelling the initial Norman attacks on the Balkan Peninsula, focused on reforming the Roman state. Alexios I's reforms were consequential both in terms of simplifying the vast bureaucratic apparatus that the empire did not need at a time of territorial contraction, as well as in terms of the restructuring of the elites. Namely, Alexios I Komnenos ended the rivalry between different clans of the empire's prominent families--both those connected to military and civilian affairs--through a series of intermarriages that at the time of his death in 1118 left the empire's elites connected through kinship. The newly intermarried elites were granted titles and offices of importance in the state, which allowed them to exercise influence. The closer the married couple was to the emperor, the higher the title they held. The immediate offspring of Alexios I continued to rule the empire for another two generations when the side branches of the family entered the competition for the imperial office. While the imperial office was technically still open to anybody, as in the past, Alexios I's dynastic policies made the elites so interconnected that all the emperors that ruled the Roman state until 1453 were in some way related to him.

The *de facto* change in the ways in which the empire was governed was noticed by Alexios I's contemporaries, not least of all the emperor's daughter Anna Komnene, who wrote *The Alexiad*, a historical account of her father's reign, making her the only female historian in pre-modern Mediterranean and Europe. In the excerpt provided here, we see how Komnene describes Alexios I's decision to leave the reins of the state in the hands of his mother Anna Dalassene while he was going to war. While Komnene had a very positive view of her father's familial policies, other contemporaries of Alexios I saw these changes as harmful to the state. The second excerpt written by an ecclesiastic official by the name of Ioannes Zonaras testifies to opposition that was growing to Alexios I's running of the state.

Anna Komnene on Her Grandmother's Regency

VIII Such was the beginning of Alexius' reign, for to style him 'Emperor' at this time would be scarcely correct, as he had handed over the supervision of the Empire to his mother. Another person might yield here to the conventional manner of panegyric, and laud the birthplace of this wonderful mother, and trace her descent from the Dalassenian Hadrians and Charons, and then embark on the ocean of her ancestors' achievements-but as I am writing history, it is not correct to deduce her character from her descent and ancestors, but from her disposition and virtue, and from those incidents which rightly form the subject of history. To return once again to my grandmother, she was a very great honour, not only to women, but to men too, and was an ornament to the human race. The women's quarter of the palace had been thoroughly corrupt ever since Monomachus assumed the power of Emperor, and had been disgraced by licentious 'amours' right

up to my father's accession. This my grandmother changed for the better, and restored a commendable state of morals. In her days you could have seen wonderful order reigning throughout the palace; for she had stated times for sacred hymns and fixed hours for breakfast and for attending to the election of magistrates, and she herself became a rule and measure for everybody else, and the palace had somewhat the appearance of a holy monastery. Such then was the character of this truly extraordinary and holy woman. In sobriety of conduct she as far outshone the celebrated women of old, as the sun outshines the stars. Again, what words could describe her compassion for the poor and her liberality to the needy? Her home was a refuge, open to any of her kinsfolk who were in want and equally open to strangers too. But above all she honoured priests and monks, and nobody ever saw her at table without some monks. Her character as outwardly manifested was such as to be revered by the angels, and [87] dreaded by the very demons; even a single look from her was intolerable to incontinent men, mere wild pleasure-seekers, whereas to those of sober conduct she was both cheerful and gracious. For she understood the due measures of solemnity and severity, so that her solemnity did not in any way appear fierce and savage, nor on the other hand her tenderness slack and unchaste. This, methinks, is the due bound of orderliness, viz.: when kindness has been mingled with elevation of soul. She was naturally inclined to meditation and was constantly evolving new plans in her mind, which were not subversive of the public weal, as some murmured grumblingly, but were its salvation and destined to restore the State which was now corrupt to its former soundness, and revive, as far as possible, the almost bankrupt finances. Moreover, although she was very busy with public business, she never neglected the rules of conduct of the monastic life, but spent the greater part of the night in singing hymns, and became worn out with continual prayer and want of sleep; yet at dawn, and sometimes even at the second cock-crow, she would apply herself to State business, deciding about the election of magistrates and the requests of petitioners, with Gregory Genesius acting as her secretary. If an orator had wished to take this theme as the subject for a panegyric, who is there of those of old times of either sex distinguished for virtue whom he would not have cast into the shade 'lauding to the skies the subject of his panegyric (as is the way of panegyrist), for her actions, ideas, and conduct, as compared with others? But such licence is not granted to writers of history. Wherefore if in speaking of this queen we have treated great themes somewhat too slightly, let no one impute this to us for blame, especially those who know her virtue, her majestic dignity, her quick wit on all occasions and her mental superiority. But now let us return to the point from which we deflected somewhat to speak about the Queen.

Whilst she was directing the Empire, as we said, she did not devote the whole day to worldly cares but attended the prescribed services in the chapel of the martyr Thecla, which the Emperor Isaac Comnenus, her brother-in-law, had built for a reason I will now relate. At the time when the chieftains of the Dacians decided no longer to observe their treaty with the Romans and broke it treacherously, then, directly they heard of this, the Sauromatae (anciently called Mysians) also decided not to remain quiet in their own territory. Formerly they dwelt on the land separated from the Roman Empire by the Ister, but now they rose in a body and migrated into our territory. The reason for this migration was the irreconcilable hatred of the Dacians for their neighbours, whom they harassed with constant raids. So the Sauromatae seized the opportunity of the Ister being frozen over and by walking over it as if it were dry land, they migrated from their country to ours, and their whole tribe was dumped down within our borders and mercilessly plundered the neighbouring towns and districts. On hearing this, the Emperor Isaac decided to go to Triaditza and as he had formerly succeeded in checking the enterprises of the eastern barbarians, so he effected this stroke too with very little trouble. He collected the whole army and started on the road thither intending to expel them from Roman territory. And when he had set his infantry in battle-array, he led an attack against them, but directly they saw him, the enemy broke up into dissentient parties. Isaac, however, thinking it unwise to trust them overmuch,

attacked the strongest and bravest part of their army with a strong phalanx, and on his approaching with his men, they became panic-stricken. For they did not venture so much as to look straight at him, as if he were the Wielder of the Thunder, and when they saw the phalanx' unbroken array of shields they turned faint with fear. So they retreated a short distance and offered to meet him in battle on the third day from then, but that very same day they deserted their camps and fled. Isaac marched to the spot of their encampment and after destroying the tents and removing the booty found there, he returned in triumph. When he had got to the foot of Mount Lobitzus, a violent and most unseasonable snow-storm overtook him, for it was the 24th September, a day sacred to the memory of the martyr Thecla. The rivers at once became swollen and overflowed their banks, so that the whole plain on which the royal tent and those of the soldiers stood, looked like the sea. In a short time all their baggage had disappeared, swept away by the raging torrents, and men and beasts were numbed by the cold. Thunder rumbled in the heavens, lightning was continuous with scarcely any interval between the flashes which threatened to set all the country around on fire. The Emperor in this dilemma knew not what to do; but during a short cessation in the storm, as he had already had a great many men carried off by the wildly rushing streams, he with a few picked men left his tent and went and stood with [89] them under an oak tree. But because he heard a great noise and rumbling which seemed to proceed from the tree itself and the wind was rising quickly, he was afraid that the tree might be blown down by it, and therefore moved far enough away from the tree to ensure his not being struck by it if it fell, and there he stood dumbfounded. And immediately as if at a given signal, the tree was torn up by the roots and was seen lying along the ground; whereupon the Emperor stood amazed at God's solicitude for him. Tidings of a revolt in the East were now brought to him, so he returned to the palace. In gratitude for his escape he had a very beautiful chapel built in honour of the proto-martyr Thecla, at no little cost, richly furnished and decorated with various works of art ; there he offered sacrifices of a kind befitting Christians for his safe delivery, and for ' the rest of his life he attended divine service in it. That was the origin of the building of the chapel of the martyr Thecla, in which as I have said, the empress-mother of the Emperor Alexius regularly paid her devotions. I myself knew this woman for a short time and admired her, and all who are willing to speak the truth without prejudice, know and would testify that my words about her are not empty boasting. Had I preferred writing a laudatory article instead of a history, I could have greatly lengthened my story by different tales about her as I made plain before; now however I must bring my story back to its right subject.

Ioannes Zonaras' Conclusions about Alexios I Komnenos' Reign

[Alexios I Komnenos] was such a man who had many good traits, and how wouldn't he? These would suffice for a praise of a private citizen, but these surely are not the only qualities useful to an emperor. For the virtues for a private citizen and those for an emperor are not the same: for a private person it suffices to be of moderate character, reasonable, not easily moved by anger, and prudent in the way of living. [In order to be a good] emperor, one must add to these virtues the care for justice, the consideration for the subjects' wellbeing, and the preservation of the ancient customs of the state. He, quite on the contrary, wished to change the old ways of the polity and achieving this transformation [of the empire's customs] was

his main goal. He did not manage the affairs of the state as common or public, nor did he handle himself as a public administrator, but he thought of and named the imperial duties as his own lordship and a private matter. To the members of the senate, he did not give the expected honour, nor did he provide them with sustenance as each would deserve, rather he hastened to humble them all. Nor did he support the virtue of distributing justice in the same way for everybody, even though the very equal distribution of justice to everybody according to merit [is its characteristic]. Rather, he distributed all the public wealth by the cartload to his relatives and those in his service and to them he granted bulky yearly subventions that they were all surrounded by vast richness, they could even dismiss their service not as private citizens but in way suitable of emperors, and they obtained houses that were the size of whole cities, not in any way behind the imperial palace in terms of luxury. He did not show the same level of generosity to the remaining nobles; in order not to say anything worse, I will refrain myself from [talking about] the man.

Translation from the original source: Aleksandar Jovanović

Questions for Consideration

1. How does Anna Komnene describe her father and her grandmother in the excerpt? How does she describe Alexios' reasons for leaving the state to his mother?
2. How is Anna Dalassene represented by her granddaughter? Does Komnene approve of her grandmother's regency?
3. How does Ioannes Zonaras see Alexios I's governing practices? Of what does he accuse Alexios I?

The Eastern Mediterranean c. 1096 CE

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ



Figure 6.2 Eastern Mediterranean c. 1096 CE Courtesy of Ian Mladjov. Click anywhere on the map to open a larger version.

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Late Byzantine Period (1204-1453)

ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ

Loss and Recovery under Ioannes III Vatatzes and Michael VIII Palaiologos

In April 1204, the Romans of Constantinople experienced arguably the greatest trauma in the empire's history: the city was sacked by the crusaders. Granted, the sack happened due to a family feud over who should rule the empire, but the consequences of the conquest were dire. The empire's elites fled the capital and established themselves in the independent states in Epiros and Asia Minor. The state in Asia Minor, known to us as the Empire of Nicaea, ended up reclaiming the title of the Roman Empire, while the city of Constantinople and many European provinces remained under the control of the crusaders.

The 13th century was marked by this trauma of loss, as well as extensive efforts by several emperors to re-establish the governing apparatus in exile and to reconquer many lost territories. Two emperors were particularly successful in these endeavours: Ioannes III Vatatzes managed to enrich the treasury and revive the state administration while conquering territories in the Balkans. Vatatzes' son, Theodoros II, continued the legacy of his father, but due to premature death left the state in the hands of his minor son. The minor son was soon pushed aside by a major nobleman and official of the empire who became known as Michael VIII Palaiologos, under whose reign the city of Constantinople was reconquered in 1261.

The period of exile left us with accounts from the provinces that testify to the emperor's care for the people of the empire even after the loss of Constantinople. Thus, we see that the connection between imperial legitimacy and the public consensus remained unchanged in the period following 1204. In the first excerpt potentially written by Theodoros Skoutariotes, we read about the emperor Ioannes III in action, taking care of the people's needs in their exiled empire. Following the laudatory account by Skoutariotes, we move to an autobiographical account of Michael VIII Palaiologos, who like Augustus, had the text inscribed on his monastery of Saint Demetrios in Constantinople so that it was accessible to the public. Lastly, we look at the means Michael VIII used to win the goodwill of the people, the senators, and the high clergy of the church to support his elevation to the imperial throne at the expense of the child-emperor Ioannes IV.

Theodoros Skoutariotes on Imperial Duties to the People

[A Dialogue between Theodoros I Laskaris and a Simpleton]

[A naïve citizen] was walking down the street of the Nicene megalopolis, and to those who happened to be there he joyfully exclaimed: "very soon a good emperor will show up." The word of this chatter came to the emperor's attention and this foreteller was swiftly brought before the ruler. Presented with questions, he admitted to say those words he was accused of and the emperor asked: "And what of me? Do I not look like a good emperor to you?" and the man said: "and what have you ever given to me so that I would think of you as good?" To this the emperor said: "do I not give myself to you on a daily basis fighting to the death for you and your compatriots?" but the man responded back at him: "so does the sun shine and thus provides us with warmth and light, but we are not thankful to it; since it fulfills the job it is supposed to do. And you do what

you are behoved to do, toiling and labouring, as you say, for the sake of your compatriots.” The emperor then asked the man: “if I give you a gift, would I be good then?” to which the simpleton responded, “but of course.”

[On Ioannes III's deeds]

Who could even count all the things provided under his rule for each city, not just the big and famous ones, but also for those that were, and fairly so, not called cities but fortifications because of their smallness and invisibility, both in the land of the East and in the West. For their [the cities'] protection and security, fortifications were built around the buildings, thus there was a tower on top of a tower. [...] And in big cities the men who were blacksmiths were making weapons for a salary. So many bows, so many arrows, and all the other weapons that the workers produced yearly, were stockpiled in the communal storages and the number [of the weapons] surpassed [the needed amount], so that the defenders [of a city] had no need for anything else. He also set up villages to import fruits from them and storage them into the granaries, that is the horrea, in numbers of thousands and tens of thousands medimni of not just barley and wheat but also other grains that where needed. [...]

In the Lydian city of Magnesia, where the lion share of the treasury was located, was there anything that one could wish for from the things we men might use, that is not found [in it] and does not belongs to the realm of enjoyment, and [I do] not [mean] only the goods that are found in our lands, but also all those that are from around the world, I refer to Egypt, India and other places?

Translation from the original source: Aleksandar Jovanović

Michael VIII Palaiologos on His Actions

1. “Lord my God, I will glorify thee.” Now is the fitting time for my majesty to recite the sublime words of Isaiah: “Lord my God, I will sing hymns to thy name, for thou hast done wonderful things for me” (Is. 25:1). You have magnified your mercy toward your servant and you have been lavish with your compassion. Lord, is there even one of those things which your merciful heart had done for me that does not surpass the very notion of miracle? Right from my birth you honor me with your own hands. You create me from nothing, and you create me according to your image and likeness. Together with my soul you place within me reason and intelligence, capable of finding the noblest things and of guiding me toward knowledge of you. You honor me with free will and you order me to rule over all creatures on earth. You fashioned me, a man that is, as a sovereign nature truly in imitation of you, the only God and lord. But these benefactions are common to the entire race. Everyone partakes of them. Every human being is well aware of these and professes gratitude for these gifts and gives praise to the creator.

But to list what I in a special manner, apart from the others, have received from your providence, one could more easily count the grains of sand by the sea and the drops of rain than draw up such a list. For some men may boast of an illustrious family or wealth. Others may be admired because they have sired valiant sons, others because of their influence with emperors. Others have been outstanding because of their military leadership and trophies of battle. While some have been privileged to possess one of these qualities, others

have sometimes possessed several. But [as] for me, why should I not speak the truth, for it is known to all? In talking of these matters I am not simply bragging about myself or being proud or ostentatious. I am not boasting as a man usually does, but I am doing it in the Lord so as not to hide in silence the great deeds of God. On the contrary I shall relate them fully not to praise myself but to glorify the creator. But for me God has heaped together all those things which individually would have made a person illustrious.

2. Let me begin straightaway with my parents. My father can trace his family to ancestors who were related by marriage to emperors and empresses, whereas my mother traces hers directly to emperors. From far back then God established our illustrious family and laid the foundations for my present rule. For the moment I pass over my maternal and clearly imperial ancestry. Concerning my father's side, the Palaiologos family, investigation shows that their ancient noble repute only increased with time, and that the fathers continuously handed on to their sons a greater repute than they had received. As to how the members of the family placed the prosperity to be found here below second to their concern about living in a manner pleasing to God which would lead them to inherit the life hidden in Him [God], we shall refer [the reader] to the discourses and books composed by the learned. For these give an account not only of their dignities and honors, the great influence they had with rulers, and how they accumulated vast riches, no less than of their combat in wartime, their generalship, and their valor, but they also inform us of their erection of religious houses, holy convents and monasteries, their donation of property, their aid to the poor, their concern for the infirm, and their protection of the indigent of all sorts, and all their pious deeds which bore fruit before God. By proclaiming the donor of these, at the same time they purchased goods in heaven in exchange for ephemeral and perishable ones.

3. This good reputation as well as the piety, which increased greatly, as mentioned, with the contributions of each succeeding generation, were inherited by the *megas doux* my grandfather and the *megas domestikos* my father. Even if their abundant hope in God and their love [of him], as well as their prominence, their glory, and their unswerving constancy in all circumstances cannot be read about in books, there may still be many people alive who have seen these with their own eyes, while many have also heard about them from witnesses. Thus, our account of them is not without corroboration, and what we say is by no means wide of the mark. It is not right, moreover, to make up stories on such subjects, because we have recalled them in recognition of the benefactions of God to us in the past and up to the present, and not because of some conceit or the need to triumph or show off.

4. Now that I have given an account of this great and noble heritage, how much I have enriched it—this is your gift, Lord God, from your goodness and not from me—indeed how much I have enriched it the very facts proclaim. Before I had completely outgrown my infancy my uncle, the revered emperor John [III Doukas Vatatzes (1222–54)], introduced me to the palace. He had me carefully raised and instructed as though I were his own son. He was anxious that I should be well educated in all subjects and endeavors, and he seemed more loving than a father in my regard. If indeed I derived profit from being initiated by that great spirit and proved myself a worthy disciple of that master, let others judge. As for myself, from adolescence as soon as I was capable I was called to bear arms. I was judged suited for command by the emperor himself, not to mention that I was selected over those who had followed such a career for many years. I was indeed assigned to command and found myself posted to the West. With God's help I overcame the hostile forces arrayed against us, overcoming no less the expectations of the emperor who had sent me. There was nothing that did not deserve to be recounted, and at that time the emperor listened with pleasure to reports of my achievements. Then, as though through multiplying proofs of love and desirous of attaching me to himself by all sorts of

ties, he became my father-in-law by betrothing to me his own niece whom he loved as his daughter.⁶ She in turn became the mother of my children, the mother of emperors.

5. Then I was again placed in command, and again there were battles. Once more God granted me victory and complete success. At that time I was entrusted with the war against the Latins for whom, to its misfortune, the queen of cities served as a fortress. From my camp on the Asiatic side opposite the city I can say that, with God as my ally, I drove them to the last extremities. On all sides I prevented them from landing, I repelled their assaults, and I cut off their vital supply lines. All this took place while that man [John III Doukas Vatatzes] was still alive. We advanced “from glory to glory” (II Cor. 3:18) and from great beginnings became ever greater, with God guiding us along the path of prosperity. But when the government of the Romans passed from him to his son [Theodore II Laskaris (1254–58)] our time came to be tested by the arrows of jealousy which have tested many others.

How did God deliver us at that time and how from such oppression did “He brought me out into a wide place” (Ps. 17 [18]:19)? To put it succinctly, he saved me [by sending me] to the Persians [Turks].⁸ There he took me by my right hand and gloriously added to what he had given me. Even now one can still hear them singing the praise of our battle line as it faced the Massagetai [Tatars], its morale as it charged into battle, and its great victory over warriors who were up to then regarded as invincible. This was achieved in the midst of Persian territory, not by us but by God working through us. After this, therefore, a vast number of delegations and letters were sent to us from the emperor, recalling us to our fatherland and to our family, who were also entreating us to return. This would please the emperor as nothing else I can think of, for he knew that while I was with the Persians in body, I was (I swear by God that this is true) with him and the Romans in spirit. This would also please the dignitaries and all of ours. But since my discourse has other goals, I think I should hasten to attend to them and leave these topics.

6. Thus we returned home. “Come hear and I will tell all ye that fear God what great things he has done for my soul” (Ps. 65 [66]:16). Then came the consummation of God’s many and great bene- factions; then came the conclusion of his interventions, the gold crown of the good things received from him. What transpired? After a short time the autocrator Theodore [II Laskaris] passed on, bringing his allotted span of life to a happy end. “Who shall tell the mighty acts of the Lord; who shall cause all thy praises to be heard?” (Ps. 105 [106]:2). I was raised up to be emperor of your people. The proof of this is clear and unambiguous. For it was not the many hands coming to assist me or their frightening weapons which elevated me above the heads of the Romans. It was not any highly persuasive speech delivered by me or by my supporters which fell upon the ears of the crowd, filled them with great hopes, and convinced them to entrust themselves to me. No, it was your right hand, Lord, which did this mighty deed. Your right hand raised me on high, and established me as lord of all. I did not persuade anyone, but was myself persuaded. I did not bring force to bear on anyone, but was myself forced.

7. This then is what happened up to the present, to select a few things from many as typical. Such have been the graces of God. There are many, I believe, who would like to write about subsequent events, but the very number of them should overcome their eagerness. For we accomplished mighty deeds in you our God, and it was you who reduced our enemies to naught. Just as I was beginning my reign I was victorious in Thessaly over those who had been in rebellion against Roman rule for many years and who had developed more hostility to our interests than had our natural enemies. Along with them I overcame their allies who were under the command of [William II Villehardouin (1246–78)] the prince of Achaia. Who were these allies? Germans, Sicilians, Italians, some who came from Apulia, others from Iapyges [Calabria] and Brindisi. There were also some from Boeotia, Euboea, and the Peloponnesos who joined them on campaign not so much

in observance of their alliance as motivated by their own ambition to set themselves up as masters, so they intended, of the situation in the region. There was a large number of them, more than could be easily counted, and greater than their number was their strength. Even more [impressive] than these was their arrogance, their insolent and outrageous audacity, and more than these, their terrible hatred toward us. Trusting in you, my king and my God, I counterattacked and was victorious, and drove all of them together into bondage.

With the army under my command I then went and subjugated Akarnania, Aetolia, and the region about the gulf of Krisa. I also forced the one and the other Epiros to submit, and brought Illyria under my control. I advanced to Epidamnos [Durazzo], and then from another direction I attacked all of Phokike. I then ravaged the country of Levadia and moved against that of Kadmeia [Boeotia]. Our forces encamped in Attica and enjoyed themselves as though it were their own land. I passed through Megara and its strait. I coursed through the entire Peloponnesos, pillaging some areas and forcing the submission of others. The remnants of the tyrant's rule in that land, those who had escaped battle and the Roman manacles, I convinced that they must of necessity prefer to fix their dwellings in the sea rather than on dry land.

I think it well to pass over the vast number of deeds effected at that time by the right hand of the most high [God] through us both in Greek lands and elsewhere. At that time in fact the Mysians [Bulgarians] in Europe tried to put us to the test, and so did the Scythians [Mongols]. The former found that we were allies, helpers, and to sum it up, saviors, whereas the latter found us to be the opposite as we defeated, scattered, and destroyed them. The Persians [Turks] also had some experience of us, for while our gaze was on the West, they decided not to keep the peace, but considered it a golden opportunity. What did they find? We destroyed them, took them captive, and made those evil men depart this life in an evil way. But there is no need to dwell on these topics. All those things must be put aside, and we must turn our attention to what came next and which it is impossible not to call to mind.

8. Constantinople, the citadel of the inhabited world, the imperial capital of the Romans, had, with the permission of God, come under the control of the Latins. By God's gift it was returned to the Romans through us. All those who had previously attempted this, even though they made their attempts with noble enthusiasm and with faultless military skill, appeared to be shooting arrows straight up into the sky and to be attempting the impossible. All the peoples surrounding us, instead of being struck with astonishment at this and living in peace and realizing that this deed had not been accomplished by the hand of men but was a triumph of God's great power, struck by envy set themselves in motion. We attacked the Persians in the region of Karia and the sources of the Maeander and the nearby region of Phrygia. Even if we refrained from utterly exterminating these upstarts, we reduced many of them to slavery to us. In the other direction, the Bulgarians, in return for having been saved by us acted in a senseless manner by granting the Massagetai (Tatars) passage, thus allowing them to overrun the part of Thrace under our rule. They rose up themselves to join in the attack, but not many days later we gave them back sevenfold.

We purged the sea of its pirates by sending our triremes into the Aegean, where they had not been seen for many years. In this manner we liberated the islands which had been tyrannized by the tyranny [of the pirates] and at the same time we made it safe for people to sail anywhere on the sea. We brought all of Euboea, which possessed large land and naval forces, over to our side, except for one very small area. We won a brilliant naval victory over a huge fleet of triremes from Euboea, leaving only one ship to bring back news of the defeat.

9. [Charles of Anjou (1266–82)] the king of Sicily who ruled over that part of the mainland opposite Sicily and who also ruled over Italy from Brindisi to Tuscany including Florence and as far as Liguria, had already

made an attempt on Greek territory and had rendered assistance to the Latins in Euboea as well as to those in Thebes. He fought valiantly and without stint on behalf of the remnants of his race in the Peloponnesos, coming to their aid with a force one could not treat lightly, and dispatching his soldiers all over Greece. Twice and even three times we defeated his troops when they were all assembled together in Euboea on orders to concentrate their forces there for the purpose of recovering that place from us. Several times, moreover, we were victorious in the Peloponnesos against those who wanted to regain that land. One of our naval squadrons gained a victory over the rulers of Thebes and Euboea when they had assembled their armies together. Our men disembarked from the ships and engaged them in a cavalry battle, with the result that one of the rulers died and that the other one trying to escape did not, being led [instead] in chains before us.

With God as our ally we destroyed that king whom we mentioned [Charles of Anjou], as well as that force advancing toward the Illyrians with the intention not so much that they would engage large numbers in battle and would overcome all those they encountered, but that their forces were strong enough to gain a victory over ten times that number. But this army destroyed itself along the sea coast. Well inland in that region another much larger and more impressive army fell apart and was given over into our hands by God. The barbarian king grew more insane and intensified the war against us. All the hostility which a person might feel against another would be much less than that which he, outdoing his hostility, displayed against us. Although defeated at every encounter, he did not give up, and the continual disasters only made him more quarrelsome. Each new army he sent was stronger than the one before it. Surely it was God who drove him on to the fatal blow.

The result was that he sent this very last army. Most impressive it was with a large number of elite fighting men, with no expense spared, with an abundance of horses, weapons, and all the equipment for war. This army, vaunting its obvious superiority, marched inland a day's journey from the sea and began a siege of a city that was still Roman. A palisade was erected all around and the siege began. The king refused to lift the siege until God had taken his camp by siege and delivered it to us. That is what happened to his army.

As far as the rest of his forces were concerned, the Sicilians scorned them as though they did not exist. They boldly took up arms and freed themselves from slavery. If I were to say that their present freedom was brought about by God, and were to add that he brought it about by means of us, I would be saying only what confirms the truth. But if I were to list our other victories such as those we gained in Europe against the Triballians [Serbians], after having defeated the Bulgarians in Mysia, and in Asia against the Persians, defeated these peoples several times, my words would be transformed into a discourse much longer than the present one.

10. With the aid of the above, therefore, and with many others of the same sort God made my life a happy one. In addition he has granted me a gift of fine children, something which surpasses the prayers of all men. "Kings have come forth from me" (Gen. 17:6). Now, my God, I gaze upon my son who is emperor and upon his son also an emperor, seated upon my throne (cf. Ps. 131 [132]:11). The valor of the one has gained many victories, and he is concerned about the salvation of his people rather than his own life, which is indeed what I most desire, and he makes this the object of all his cares, study and labors. His son furnishes us with noble hopes that he will soon arrive at the same lofty goal.

11. There are so many proofs of the great mercy of God to me, and I owe them to the supplications of all my holy patrons, but especially to those of my great defender, I mean Demetrios [whose body] exudes scented oil. As an ambassador he is always, I am certain, presenting my case to God. I know too that from long ago and up to the present God has sent him as a shield to protect my life and the empire, and I have no doubt that he bestows his own favor on me. Of all the things I have done as emperor, particularly those which were

truly imperial inasmuch as they affected the common good, there is not one in which when I called upon him to come he did not immediately give me the sensation of his actual presence and assistance. Because he has so often and in such significant ways come to our aid, we have continuously been mindful of him and have expressed our gratitude to the Martyr of Christ. But one thing was still lacking, and that was for us to transpose our good disposition into deeds and to express in a more substantial manner the great love we nourish in the depth of our heart for the divine Demetrios. In the same way as his acts of intercession, so should our thanksgiving when put into deeds “bear fruit for God” (Rom. 7:4). For whatever one does out of reverence to his servants, that veneration obviously passes on to him.

12. Now then, in times long past the blessed George Palaiologos was preeminent because of his burning religious zeal and great love of God, as well as because of his intelligence, courage, and military experience which he displayed in the conflicts and wars of that period and which earned him abundant honors from the emperor and covered him with glory. He was the first to erect from its very foundations a venerable, holy house dedicated to this Martyr of Christ inside this imperial city. This [saint whose body] exudes scented oil appears to have been the ancestral patron of the house of the Palaiologoi. But the tyranny of the Latins, directly opposed to what he had built, razed it to the ground and reduced it to fine dust so one could barely make out a few faint traces of what it had once been. With the grace of God and the aid of the divine martyr Demetrios my majesty raised up again this building which had fallen and was lying there in ruins, and with a liberal and generous hand restored it to its former splendor. We also established a monastery and settled monks therein to [perform service] pleasing to God. We allocated property to them and sources for adding to their income so they could meet their expenses and provide for the rest of their bodily needs.

What we accomplished was most praiseworthy for two reasons. We satisfied our love for the Martyr by glorifying God, which after all was what had motivated my majesty in the first place. The second result was that we renewed the memory of the blessed founder, our ancestor, which men had already consigned to oblivion. To add a third, my majesty established this new monastery which would permit many to come together in it to lead a religious life which would be most pleasing to God; the number of those praying for us would increase, and in return our reward and recompense would be the greater. For if a person who gives even a glass of cold water does not lose his reward, according to the truthful words of my God and Savior (Matt. 10:42), then by providing those who love the ascetical way of life with the opportunity of doing something pleasing to God and by so arranging matters that they might more conveniently attain their chosen goal, how shall this go unrewarded by him who said that the whole world is not worth as much as one soul (cf. Matt. 16:26). For these reasons, therefore, my majesty has built up again this shrine to God and to his martyr Demetrios. By the intercession of this gloriously triumphant saint may it become a veritable paradise, filled with monks who, like magnificent, ever blooming plants, every day produce in great abundance the fruit of virtue, to the glory of the one God, to the glory of the great Martyr whose name it is privileged to bear, and for the expiation of my many failings, for it should be no surprise that I too have sinned inasmuch as I am human and thus of a quickly changing or fluctuating nature.

Georgios Pachymeres on Michael VIII Palaiologos' Tactics to Win Over the People, the Senate, and the Church to Support His Taking of the Imperial Office

The best to rule is the one who comes through virtue and by proving that he is the best [to rule]. This benefits the masses since those who are appointed to rule accept the reason for which they have been elected. Just as we do not choose the doctor capable of rendering health from illness on the basis of fortune or birth, so too if we chose the man who must hold the tiller on the basis of birth, then we have placed a pirate, rather than a captain, in charge of the ship. And it is likely that the one who most needs to be pure and well educated, so that he may rule well, will be totally impure, since from his birth he is surrounded with imperial luxuries and soft living, and besieged by flatterers, while truth is banished, and the evillest things are presented as the best. [...]

[Michael VIII Palaiologos] promised to rectify many things: to elevate the ranking of the Church, to honour the priests in greater measure; to promote to a higher rank in state administration those who were worthy; to accept fair judgements and to appoint those who would judge impartially, of whom by far the most important was Michael Kakos, also called Senachereim, who was well educated in both logic and laws; he would grant him the office of protasekretis, which had been left vacant in a long while, and would be willing to give him subordinates, so that he could judge remaining impartial and uncorrupted. Furthermore, he would honour education as well as those engaged in scholarship more than anybody else; he would unconditionally show love to the soldiers and their pronoiar, and if they fell in battle, or if they died, these [pronoiar] would pass down to their children, even if their wives were only pregnant; he would not even speak of introducing unjust levies; there would be no room for slander, the duels would end, as well as the ordeal by iron, since the most terrible danger would be impended if somebody would put the ordeal by iron in practice. The affairs of the polity would be maintained free of any fear in peace so that the rich who had great fortunes would demonstrate their wealth and gain glory without any angst.

[...] While the child [Ioannes IV] was not paying attention, being engaged in childish games, the man who was now reigning made speeches frequently on that day and afterwards, to endear himself to the masses, throwing silver coins at them with both hands; they gathered them and allegedly praised their benefactor, losing interest in the child and his affairs, without knowing what level of evil they had reached: for the plot of one emperor against the other had already begun.

Translation from the original source: Aleksandar Jovanović

Questions for Consideration

1. In Skoutariotes' short story about a simpleton and emperor Theodoros I Laskaris, how is the simpleton

described? How does he speak to the emperor? What do we learn about the people's expectations of the imperial office holder?

2. How does Skoutariotes depict Ioannes III as a good emperor? What is the focus of his argument and what does this tell us about the expectations the people had of their emperors?
3. How does Michael VIII describe his reign? How does he justify his rise to the throne and what roles are ascribed to the people and God?
4. What methods did Michael VIII employ in order to win over different socio-economics groups in the empire to support his imperial takeover? What do these methods tell us about the importance of a general public consensus in the later history of the empire?

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ALEKSANDAR JOVANOVIĆ

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MEDIEVAL TECHNOLOGIES: THE STIRRUP

Section Author: Jessica Hemming, Corpus Christi College

Learning Objectives

- Trace the invention and spread of the stirrup, recognizing the difficulties arising from a lack of written evidence.
- Explain the technical advantages offered by the stirrup.
- Summarize the arguments of the so-called Great Stirrup Controversy.

Sometimes the simplest technological innovations can have a profound social and historical impact. The most famous example is perhaps the invention of the wheel in late prehistory. The metal stirrup was less world-changing than the wheel, but nevertheless represented a breakthrough in riding technology that led to widespread improvements in the effective use of the horse in combat. This in turn gave rise to several knock-on effects that will be examined in this module. Invented in East Asia no later than 300 CE and perhaps much earlier, the iron stirrup reached Europe by the middle of the sixth century, and by the end of that century it had been adopted by the Byzantine imperial army. Its spread north of the Alps is harder to trace with any precision, but it was likely adopted by the Franks from the neighbouring **Avars** some time during the earlier part of the Carolingian period (in the late 8th into early 9th centuries). It may also have reached Scandinavia at around the same time, although the route it took is not entirely clear. In both cases adoption of the stirrup seems to have been slow and patchy.

Why was it so important? Although it is perfectly feasible to achieve very high standards of horsemanship without stirrups, this humble item of tack makes certain manoeuvres easier or at least more effective—particularly with regard to the military use of the horse. Rigid stirrups provide solid platforms that support and brace a rider's feet, giving a more secure seat in the saddle and allowing the rider to stand up, if necessary, to deliver a forceful downward blow. Similarly, they add extra stability to that already provided by a saddle with a high pommel and cantle (the raised parts at the front and back, respectively), thus allowing a rider to withstand greater frontal impacts generated by using a **couched** lance. They also make mounting much easier and can help relieve leg-fatigue; these issues are not specific to military situations and explain why once stirrups were in wide use among European cavalries, they were then used for the everyday riding purposes of any members of society who could afford to keep a saddle horse.

Perhaps surprisingly, the process of the acquisition and military deployment of stirrups in the early Middle Ages provoked a 20th-century scholarly debate of sufficient prominence to have a nickname of its own: The Great Stirrup Controversy.

A serious impediment to the study of the invention and spread of the stirrup is the extremely limited number of written sources referring to this object. The Byzantine military strategy handbook called the *Stratēgikon*, written or commissioned by Emperor Maurice c.600, includes the only clear written reference from the approximate time when stirrups began to be used in Europe. Archaeology in this case must be used to supplement the historical record, but this only provides a partial picture because early finds of stirrups tend to be in graves and not all peoples buried their dead with grave goods. Artistic representations in illuminated

manuscripts of horses with stirrups also provide evidence, although this is fairly limited before the 11th century. One famous three-dimensional artwork is the monumental cliffside sculpture in Bulgaria known as the Madara Rider, thought to represent the early Bulgarian king Tervel (reigned 701-18).¹ Unfortunately, erosion has damaged the clarity of this sculpture's outlines and the stirrup is no longer as visible as it must once have been.



Figure 7.1 The Madara Rider, probably very early 8th century, Bulgaria (UNESCO World Heritage Site). More information about this monument is available on the [UNESCO site](#).

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1. Uwe Fielder, "Bulgars in the Lower Danube Region," in *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans*, edited by Florin Curta with the assistance of Roman Kovalev (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151-236 (esp. 202).

Origins of the True Stirrup

JESSICA HEMMING

Origins

In this section we will be concerned primarily with the origins of the true stirrup—made of iron, set in pairs, and capable of supporting the full weight of a rider. At various times and in various places, stirrup-like items of horse equipment, made of leather or rope or wood, have been used to aid mounting (in which case only one is needed) or to provide some basic rest for the feet. Some of these constructions are simple loops in which to place the big toe (obviously, the rider must be barefoot); others are open platforms. Both kinds of supports are known from parts of India from at least the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. It is likely that they also existed elsewhere and earlier. The modern terms stirrup in English and *étrier* in French both derive from Germanic words for ropes or leather straps, suggesting simple mounting aids in perishable materials (Old English *stigrāp* “climbing rope,” a combination of *stigan* “to climb” plus *rāp* “rope”; Old French *estr(i)eu* from Frankish **streup*).¹

The iron stirrup is another matter. From a technological point of view, its prerequisites are (1) sophisticated metalworking techniques that produce a quality of iron that stands up well to stress and (2) a robust saddle with a wooden framework inside it called a “tree.” While it may seem obvious that only a culture that rides horses extensively would invent stirrups, it must be observed that a great many equestrian cultures managed very well without them for centuries. In fact, the greater a rider’s skill, the less need he or she has for the assistance of stirrups. This creates something of a paradox in the search for the peoples responsible for their invention.

The earliest firm evidence for stirrups comes from China and adjacent parts of Korea: a ceramic figurine of a riderless, saddled horse with paired stirrups was unearthed near Nanjing and has been dated to c.322 CE; actual sets of stirrups have been found in several graves of the 4th and early 5th centuries, although these all seem to have been made of composites of wood with metal plating (mostly bronze, which is not as strong as iron).² By the 5th century stirrups appear to have become widespread over the entire region, most likely including Japan as well.

1. In fact, all the Germanic languages share this same “climbing rope” word. Variants occur in Old Norse (a Scandinavian language), Old High German, Old Saxon, and Middle Dutch. See the complete Oxford English Dictionary under “stirrup.” The comparable authoritative French dictionary is the Larousse.
2. Albert E. Dien, “The Stirrup and its Effect on Chinese Military History,” *Ars Orientalis* 16 (1986): 33–56 (33–34); Mark E. Lewis, *China between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 60. Dien’s article includes photographs of the riderless horse figurine and of additional early 4th-century figurines of horses and riders (some with stirrups), all now in the Nanjing Museum, China.

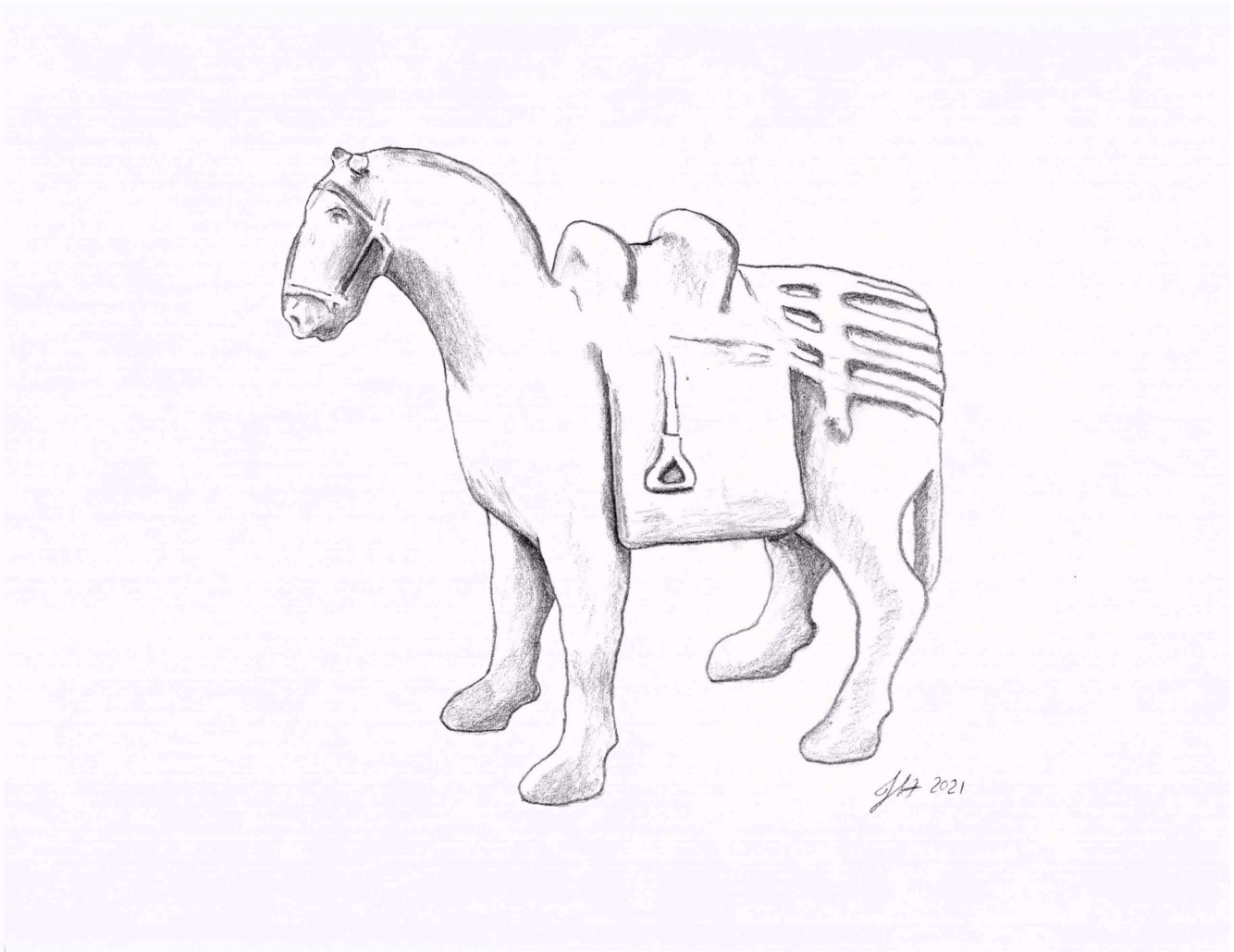


Figure 7.2 Ceramic figurine of horse with stirrups from a tomb near Nanjing, China. Dated c.322. Drawing by Jessica Hemming after Dien, “The Stirrup and its Effect on Chinese Military History,”

However, in their adoption of cavalry more generally, the Chinese had been profoundly influenced by the nomadic cultures of the Eurasian steppe with whom they came into regular contact (and conflict) particularly to the north and north-west. The steppe peoples were supreme equestrians; they were also highly mobile and interacted with all the ancient, settled civilizations that bordered the steppe zone. At various times such groups actually replaced—at least temporarily—the ruling elites in some of these great civilizations (this happened, for example, in Korea, China, and Persia, and then later in northern India and on the Anatolian Peninsula).³ Remarkably, ancient Chinese records indicate that an official policy decision was made in 307 BCE by the ruler of the northern state of Zhao to train soldiers to ride horses like the northern nomads—and to shoot arrows from horseback like them too, as steppe horsemen were famous for their mounted archery.⁴ This is well before the stirrup, but gives a sense of the Chinese awareness of the advantages of adopting certain military skills and technologies

3. Pamela Kyle Crossley, *Hammer and Anvil: Nomad Rulers at the Forge of the Modern World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

4. Victor H. Mair, “The Horse in Late Prehistoric China: Wresting Culture and Control from the ‘Barbarians,’” in *Prehistoric Steppe Adaptation and the Horse*, ed. Marsha Levine, Colin Renfrew, and Katie Boyle (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2003), 174.

from their “barbarian” neighbours. Prior to this time horses were used in China to pull the chariots of elite warriors, but not for riding.⁵ We also know that Chinese rulers imported quality horses extensively from Central Asia, for use in the military and to improve their own breeding stock. Interestingly, there is some evidence that well into the medieval period the Chinese still considered horseback riding to be the special expertise of the steppe peoples, to the extent of depicting grooms in paintings as dressed in Central Asian style.⁶

What we do not know for sure is whether the iron stirrup was developed by the Chinese, around 300 CE or so, in order to compensate for the fact that their soldiers were not as accomplished in the saddle as were the steppe nomads, or whether it was invented on the steppes and then eagerly adopted in China and elsewhere. The wooden saddle-tree (one of the prerequisites for heavy-duty stirrups) appears to be a steppe innovation; plus, the steppe cultures had excellent ironworking skills from an earlier date than did China. These facts would tend to suggest a steppe origin for iron stirrups, except that this leaves open the question of why they were not invented much earlier. Certainly, the nomadic equestrian peoples whose cavalry skills were recorded in writing by the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Persians were devastatingly effective riders without stirrups, specializing in exceptional mounted archery. On the other hand, later nomadic groups that came into Europe in the medieval period—from the Avars in the 6th century to the Mongols in the 13th — were using stirrups: why did they use them if they were such good horsemen? One recent suggestion, which accommodates all the complex evidence, is that the largescale adoption of stirrups in their cavalries was driven by the needs of the later steppe empires to field much larger numbers of soldiers than they ever had in the past. Stirrups, it should be recalled, are an aid for riders who cannot reliably hold their seat in difficult situations without the extra bracing. The provision of stirrups as standard cavalry kit allows commanders to get many more fighters onto horseback even if they are not the very best riders.⁷ In any event, once invented the iron stirrup spread rapidly and was found all across central Eurasia by about 500 CE and then across the entire continent from Western Europe to East Asia by about 800 CE,⁸

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5. Chauncey S. Goodrich, “Riding Astride and the Saddle in Ancient China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44, no. 2 (1984), 280–82.

6. Mair, “Horse in Late Prehistoric China,” 183.

7. See Pamela Kyle Crossley, “Flank Contact, Social Contexts, and Riding Patterns in Eurasia, 500–1500,” in *How Mongolia Matters: War, Law and Society*, edited by Morris Rossabi (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 129–46 (esp. 130–31). She is mainly discussing types of saddles here but applies the same argument to stirrups (pers. comm., May 2020).

8. Crossley, “Flank Contact,” 134. Crossley credits the “nearly invincible Tang [dynasty, 618–907] imperial cavalry” of the Chinese for diffusing the stirrup across the remainder of Asia in this period (Hammer and Anvil, 16).

Spread

JESSICA HEMMING

The Diffusion of the Stirrup into Europe

This brings us to the subject of the diffusion of the stirrup into Europe. Despite the claims in some older publications for the role of Goths (in the late 4th century) or Huns (in the mid 5th century), it is now fairly widely accepted that stirrups were brought to Europe by a Turkic-speaking steppe people called the Avars in the 6th century when they established their Central European khaganate (empire) on the Pannonian Plain, which lasted approximately 250 years. The evidence is considerable. Not only do we have the testimony of the [Stratēgikon](#) but archaeological excavations throughout the Avar settlement area in what is now mostly Hungary have uncovered numerous iron and steel stirrups.¹ The discovery of early Avar-style stirrups (which have a distinctive “apple” shape found among a range of other Turkic groups) in two Merovingian Frankish graves of the period c.580–c.610 in Germany indicates that these new Central Asian imports were of interest to the adjacent populations, although perhaps only as war booty or elite gifts at first.²



Figure 7.3 Avar “apple-shaped” stirrups, 7th–8th century, Budapest Historical Museum, Hungary.

1. Florin Curta, “The Earliest Avar-Age Stirrups, or the ‘Stirrup Controversy’ Revisited,” in *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans*, edited by Florin Curta and Roman Kovalev (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 304–07; Walter Pohl, *The Avars: A Steppe Empire in Central Europe, 567–822* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 100–04.
2. Curta, “The Earliest Avar-Age Stirrups,” 307 (illustration on 304).

It is difficult to trace the spread of stirrups outward from Avar-occupied regions because of the lack of written references. Archaeology only helps up to a point. One problem—previously alluded to—is the fact that stirrups are often found in warrior burials that include grave-goods. Such “furnished” burials (as they are called) only occur among some cultural groups and even then may disappear under new conditions: for example, Scandinavians and **Lombards** practised this kind of ritual deposition of objects with the body, while a number of Slavic-speaking peoples mostly cremated their dead; the Merovingian Franks furnished their graves abundantly, but this dwindled away as the Carolingian period began. In many areas, the establishment of Christianity gradually led to a decrease in grave-goods such that overall there are few furnished graves in Christian Europe after the 8th century.³ In other words, a range of variables can skew the record. To this we must add the accident of preservation: iron holds up well in certain conditions, but it also rusts. Where stirrups have been discovered outside of burials, it has tended to be in other situations where they are protected from oxygen, such as in the mud of riverbeds.⁴

All we can say with confidence is that the stirrup was adopted slowly and patchily in Central and Western Europe. The eastern parts of Frankia—where the Franks were nearest the Avar khaganate—show quite limited stirrup-deposition in Merovingian graves dating from the end of the 7th century. One figure will serve as an example: out of approximately 700 excavated graves apparently containing warriors, only 135 contain items indicating that they were specifically cavalymen, and only 13 contain stirrups.⁵ Some other Germanic peoples in the same general region also seem to have adopted stirrups to some extent in the 7th century, judging from grave finds in parts of southern Germany associated with the **Alemanni**⁶ In Scandinavia stirrups begin to appear in archaeological sites in the 8th century and become common from the 9th and 10th centuries. In Britain it has often been thought that the technology came with the Vikings in the 9th century, although this is debated.⁷

3. Edward James, “Burial and Status in the Early Medieval West,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 39 (1989), 24.

4. Wilfred A. Seaby and Paul Woodfield, “Viking Stirrups from England and their Background,” *Medieval Archaeology* 24 (1980), 102.

5. Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 184.

6. Mark Redknap, “Ring Rattle on Swift Steeds: Equestrian Equipment from Early Medieval Wales,” in *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World: Studies in Honour of James Graham-Campbell*, edited by Andrew Reynolds and Leslie E. Webster (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 177-210 (photograph on p. 194).

7. For up-to-date and highly accessible research on the medieval military use of horses in Britain see the “Warhorse: The Archaeology of a Military Revolution?” project at the University of Exeter, England:

<https://medievalwarhorse.exeter.ac.uk/>





Figure 7.4 Viking stirrup, 10th-11th century, East Prussia, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Eastern, and especially South-Eastern, Europe is a different matter, for several reasons. As we know from the [Stratēgikon](#), the Byzantine imperial army was using stirrups from c.600. As the 7th century wore on, a new Turkic-speaking Eurasian steppe people—also using stirrups—became a power-player in the region: the Bulgars, who established a state north of the Black Sea on the Pontic Steppe c.630 and then after its collapse a new khanate (kingdom) west of the Black Sea (in the 680s) that would eventually become modern Bulgaria. In other words, South-Eastern Europe had a new influx of stirrup-using equestrian people while the Avars' European empire was still a going concern. After the Avar state finally collapsed, the Pannonian Plain of the Carpathian Basin was eventually occupied (c.900) by the Magyars, yet another group of horse-riding, stirrup-using steppe people and the last to create an enduring kingdom inside Europe: Hungary.

Questions for Consideration

1. Why do different scholars have such wildly varying opinions about when and where the metal stirrup was first invented?
2. Given that the Avars who established an empire on the Pannonian Plain brought a key equestrian technology to Europe, should they merit more attention in medieval history courses and textbooks than they currently tend to receive?
3. Did the stirrup really contribute directly to the patterns of power in Europe from roughly the eighth century to the eleventh, or would the same groups (Franks, Vikings, Normans, Germans) have been dominant even without this technology?

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- [Viking Stirrup Front](#) © Gift of Stephen V. Grancsay, 1942 is licensed under a [Public Domain](#) license

The Pictorial Evidence

JESSICA HEMMING

To return to the question of stirrup diffusion in Western and Central Europe, another type of source that can shed some light on the matter is visual art—especially in illuminated (illustrated) manuscripts. Unfortunately, there is no securely-dated artistic evidence for stirrups in manuscripts before the early 9th century. One of the earliest sources is the Apocalypse of Valenciennes, a Carolingian religious manuscript of c.800–825, which shows an exceptionally clear mounted spearman using stirrups:

hic est rex regum & dominus omnium qui vocatur fidelis & iustus
& iustitia iudicat & pugnat contra bestiam



Figure 7.5 Apocalypse of Valenciennes, c.800-25 (Valenciennes, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 99, folio 35r).

On another page we find two of the biblical “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” riding with stirrups and two without. This is intriguing, to say the least. On folio 12 verso¹ two of the apocalyptic riders appear with labels over their heads pointing out that one is an archer and one a swordsman; only the archer has stirrups. Given that the steppe peoples who used stirrups routinely were also famous for their mounted archery skills, could this be a visual allusion to an Avar or Bulgar horseman?

1. When talking about manuscripts, *recto* means the front side of a page (folio) of vellum, while *verso* means the back side of that same page. These are abbreviated like this: folio 14r, folio 14v.

Ille habet arcum

Ille habet gladium



equo albo

avi de equo ru fo

vidi quod apperuis scilicet agnus
unum de septem signa culis.
Et audiui unum de quatuor ani-
malibus dicentem tamquam voce
tonitru. Veni & vide. Ecce equus
albus & qui sedebat super illum
habebat arcum. & data est ei
corona & sicut vinces ut vinces &

Et cum apperuis scilicet sigillum
secundum. Audiui secundum
animal dicentem. Veni & vide.
Et sicut alius equus rufus &
qui sedebat super illum. Datus est
ei ut sumeret pacem de terra.
Ut in vicem se videret fieri; &
datus est ei gladius magnus.

Figure 7.6 Two of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse from the Apocalypse of Valenciennes, c.800-25 (Valenciennes, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 99, folio 12v).

Two famous Carolingian psalters (books of Psalms) of this same century offer suggestive contrasts. The earlier one, dated c.820-845, is the astonishing Utrecht Psalter, now fully digitized and annotated here on the internet.² It contains 166 pen-and-ink drawings of extraordinary energy and dynamism. Among these are numerous depictions of armed horsemen—none of whom appear to be using stirrups. Some scholars claim to see an Avar warrior with a characteristic reflex (double-curved) bow and stirrups in one of the pictures (folio 25r).³

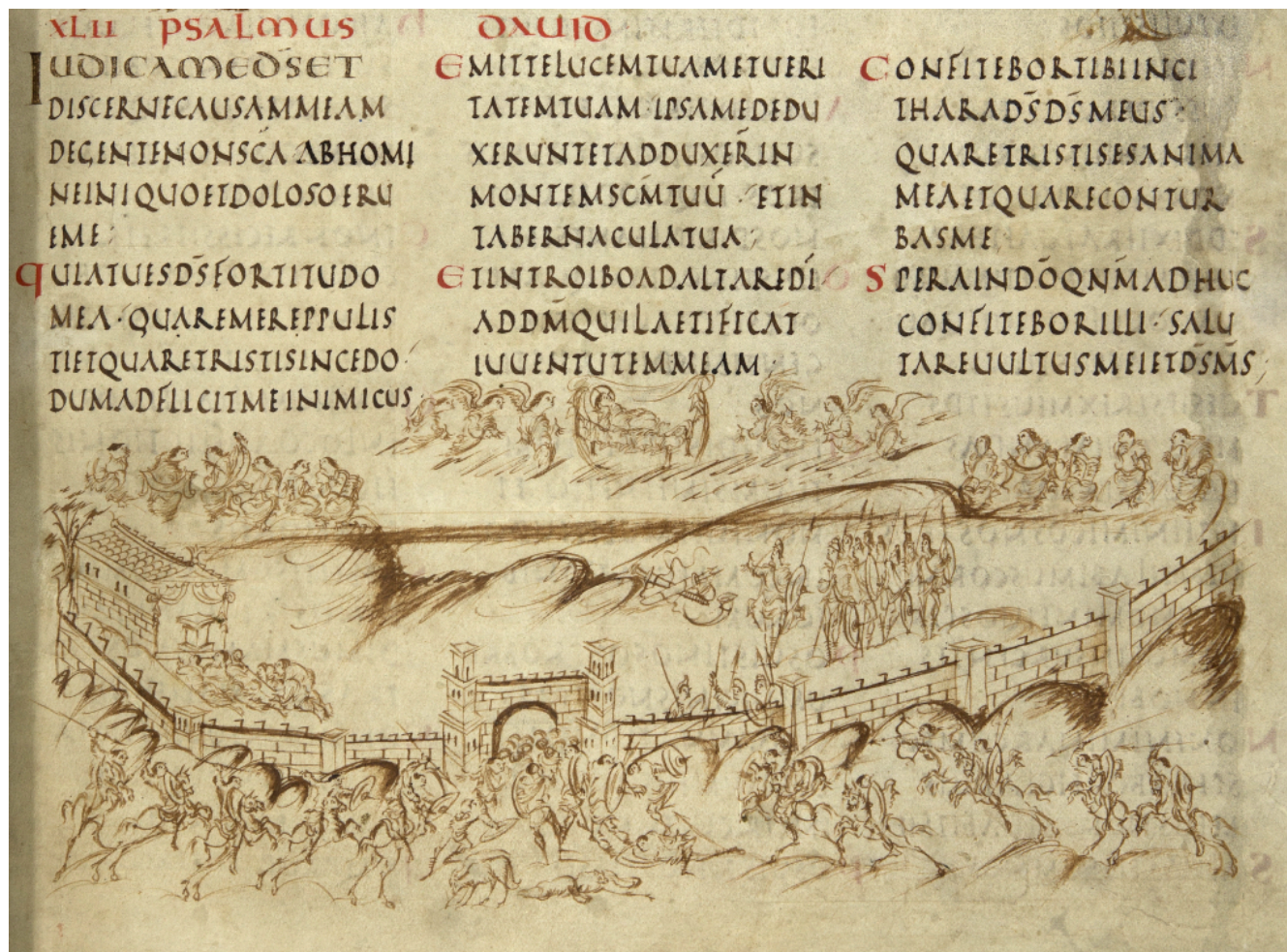


Figure 7.7 Illustrations accompanying Psalms 42 and 43 in the Utrecht Psalter (Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 32). Look closely at the horseman on the right just below the brick wall. He has a typical steppe bow, but does he have stirrups?

2. Utrecht Psalter on University of Utrecht Library website: <https://bc.library.uu.nl/utrecht-psalter.html>.

3. Pohl, *The Avars*, 377. The bow is indeed very clear, but the stirrups are invisible to most observers. You can try for yourself using the zoom-in function on the website.

The slightly later Carolingian Golden Psalter (c.883–900) from the monastery of St Gall in Switzerland, by contrast, features plenty of stirrups, although not every horseman depicted has them. This is perhaps in itself significant.



Figure 7.8 Horsemen with stirrups on pages 140 and 141 of the digitized Golden Psalter of St Gall (St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 22).

What does this pictorial evidence tell us? It only proves that some Carolingian manuscript artists (who were generally monks) were familiar with stirrups by the early 800s at latest. It suggests that some Carolingian cavalymen were actually using stirrups during this time, but that their distribution was uneven enough that illuminators were only including them sporadically, even within a single book. Although stirrups do make more frequent appearances in Western European art as time goes on, it has been pointed out more than once that on the Bayeux Tapestry (c.1080), not all the Norman horsemen are using them. We will return to this significant artefact in the section discussing the technical advantages of stirrups in warfare.

By the late 11th century, the stirrup begins to feature in Western European literature. The famous Old French martial epic known as *The Song of Roland*, which was written down in its current form c.1080, includes the words *estrief* or *estrieu* “stirrup,” derived from that same Germanic “climbing rope” word (in this case Frankish **streup*). By the end of that century, it seems likely that stirrups were quite widespread in Central and Western Europe; representations of 12th-century horsemen typically all show them using stirrups.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Pamela Kyle Crossley at Dartmouth College and Rob Webley at the University of Exeter Warhorse project for discussing some of the finer details of stirrup distribution and use with me. Professor Crossley’s expertise in the history of Eurasian steppe societies and of horsemanship clarified some especially complex issues.

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The Stratēgikon of the Emperor Maurice

JESSICA HEMMING

Byzantium Adopts the Stirrup

Towards the end of his life the Byzantine Emperor Maurice (reigned 582-602 CE) composed, or perhaps commissioned, a detailed handbook of military strategy entitled the *Stratēgikon*. Maurice by this time had already made significant reforms to the structure, equipment, and techniques of the East Roman (i.e. Byzantine) army; plus, he had many years of practical field experience fighting a wide variety of opponents of the Empire, particularly in the Balkans, Pannonia, and on the Persian border. Many military reforms had been made earlier by his predecessor Justinian (reigned 527-65), including a substantial increase in the proportion of cavalry to infantry (the latter of which had been at the heart of the famous Roman legions for centuries). Maurice similarly recognized the necessity to expand the use of cavalry, both in numbers and in terms of the variety of mounted manoeuvres and weaponry employed, from horseback archery and javelin-throwing to heavily armed mass charges with lances and swords. This pressure to transform more of the East Roman army into mounted soldiers came directly from the fact that the Empire's enemies were highly skilled horsemen. Some, like the Avars of the Eurasian **steppe** who established an empire centred on the Pannonian Plain in the late 560s (more or less exactly where the Huns had previously created their short-lived European empire in the mid-5th century), were nomadic equestrian peoples whose entire societies were based on the horse. Others, like the Persians, had been building up their heavy cavalry. It is of special relevance to this module that the Avars used stirrups at this time and that stirrup use was also spreading into the Sasanid Persian Empire and other regions in contact with steppe peoples.¹

In the *Stratēgikon* stirrups occur in two sections: Book I, section 2 which consists of a list of the weapons and other equipment required for cavalrymen; and Book II, section 8, which is about the duties and equipment of army field medics. It is important to note that Book I, section 2 includes five explicit mentions of the types of equipment that the Avars use, so that it is quite clear that a number of items of military kit have recently been borrowed from them, presumably because they are either entirely new to the Byzantines or else just better versions of things that they already use. Although the paragraph that includes the stirrups does not actually specify that they are a borrowing, the paragraphs immediately preceding and following both do list Avar items:² horse neck-armour and roomy tunics for cavalry soldiers, the latter explicitly ordered to be cut according to the Avar design. Interestingly, the author several times explains the choice of Avar-style kit on the grounds of its combination of practicality and handsome appearance.³ The tassels listed here are decorations; this is clear from the introductory part of Book I, section 2, which states that ornaments such as these serve to boost confidence and make soldiers look more intimidating to the enemy. It is also significant that the word used in Greek is *skala*, which applies to any kind of step, from staircases to ladders, indicating that no technical word for "stirrup" exists in the author's vocabulary.⁴

The extracts presented here have been translated specifically for the Ancient & Medieval Open Textbook by Aleksandar Jovanović. For a published version of the whole work, see the English translation by George Dennis, as cited.

1. For more information see the translator's introduction in George T. Dennis, trans., *Maurice's Stratēgikon. Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), esp. vii-xvi.
2. Florin Curta, "The Earliest Avar-Age Stirrups, or the 'Stirrup Controversy' Revisited," in *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans*, ed. Florin Curta and Roman Kovalev (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 302-03.
3. Dennis, *Maurice's Stratēgikon*, 12-13; Curta, "The Earliest Avar-Age Stirrups," 302.
4. Dennis, 13, n. 6.

Book I, section 2

Horses, particularly those of officers and other special soldiers, especially in the front line of battle, must have protective iron armour on their heads and iron or felted wool chest armour, or alternatively chest and neck covers like the Avars use.

It is necessary for the saddles to have thick and large saddlecloths; their bridles should be well-made. The saddles should also have **two iron stirrups**, a leather lasso, a hobble, a saddle-bag--in which, when the situation arises, it would be possible to fit three to four days of provisions for a soldier--as well as four tassels on the back straps, one on the brow-band [of the bridle], and one [tassel] under the chin. The men's clothes--tunics in particular, whether linen, or goat-hair, or coarse wool--need to be wide and full, cut in the Avar style, such that they can be secured over the knees when riding to create a tidy impression.

Book II, section 8

In order to facilitate mounting the horses for corporsman as much as for the wounded or the fallen [soldiers], it is necessary to set the corporsman's **stirrups** on the left side of the saddle. That is to say, one should be placed on the [front] curve of the saddle, as is customary, and the other should be placed on the back-curve so that both of them may mount the horse; that is, the aforementioned [medical corporsman] as well as the wounded man. The former mounts using the **stirrup** on the [front] curve, and the latter does the same by using the one on the back-curve. It is also crucial for them [medical corporsman] to carry flasks of water for those wounded men who are likely to faint.



Figure 7.9 12th-century illuminated manuscript known as the “Madrid Skylitzes”. Source: Biblioteca Digital Hispánica.

Later Byzantine stirrups can be seen in this 12th-century illuminated manuscript known as the “Madrid Skylitzes,” a lengthy historical text by John Skylitzes called *Synopsis Historiarum* (Summary of History), now housed in the National Library of Spain in Madrid. In this picture the stirrups are especially visible on the two riderless horses, although the riders’ feet can also be seen resting in stirrups. Source: Biblioteca Digital Hispánica.

Questions for Consideration

1. How might the ordinary rank and file of Byzantine soldiers have appreciated the instructions to imitate the Avar horsemen?
2. Why might there be so much emphasis on the visual elements of the cavalymen’s clothing and equipment? Consider the purpose of military uniforms, especially before the modern rise of camouflage garments.
3. Stirrups in this text are evidently part of an Avar-inspired full kit for cavalymen. What can you deduce about the uses of the other items of kit?

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The Byzantine Empire c. 600 CE

JESSICA HEMMING



Figure 7.10 The Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire is in yellow. Note the Avars immediately to the north of the Danube River border. Courtesy of Ian Mladjov. Click anywhere on the map to open a larger version.

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The Technological Advantages of the Stirrup

JESSICA HEMMING

General: Mounting and Stability

As indicated in the introduction to this module, stirrups provide two basic advantages for a rider: a “step” to use for mounting a horse and a means of supporting the feet once mounted. For mounting, only one stirrup is needed: a rider faces the horse’s side, puts the foot that is closer to the horse’s head into the stirrup, and then pushes off the ground with the other foot to swing the free leg over the rear of the horse. Linguistic evidence suggests that in Europe, at least, this was initially regarded as the primary function of stirrups.¹ Once a rider is in the saddle, a single stirrup is useless: to serve even as footrests to prevent fatigue, let alone firm foot-bracing platforms for high-stress activities like roping cattle or fighting, stirrups must be in pairs. Stirrups spread into Europe initially in a military context (see “Origins and Spread”); so our particular focus in this section is on the use of this simple technology in combat.

For stirrups to function at all, there first needs to be a rigid saddle for them to be attached to. This may seem obvious, but it is important to keep in mind. Historically, many equestrian peoples have developed high levels of horsemanship with only the use of fabric pads to cushion both horse and rider where their bodies are in contact. Even once proper saddles with a solid “tree” (an internal wooden or other rigid framework) were invented, apparently among the Eurasian steppe cultures,² they were not used everywhere and the use of simple pads or cloths continued for many centuries—in some places well into the Middle Ages.³ Even once the treed saddle has been adopted, stirrups do not necessarily follow automatically. As we have seen in the “Origins and Spread” section, although we cannot be certain when (or exactly where) paired metal stirrups were first invented, it does appear to have been considerably later than the saddle.

A saddle already provides significantly increased security of seat for a rider, even without stirrups. Furthermore, adaptations can be made to the raised parts at the front (the pommel) and rear (the cantle) to hold a rider firmly when performing manoeuvres that might otherwise be too risky. The most striking example of this is the Roman military saddle, which over time developed four leather “horns” stiffened with metal—two at the front and two at the back. Structurally, these were similar to the single horn of the modern Western (cowboy) saddle, but they were positioned to grip a cavalry rider’s thighs from the front and brace him at the back. Even without stirrups (which the Romans did not have), this would have provided a secure seat during quick stops and starts, side-to-side and circling movements of the horse, and lateral or twisting motions of the rider using a sword or spear.⁴

1. See [Origins](#) for information about early French and English (and other Germanic) words for stirrups (variations on “climbing strap”). See the introduction to our primary text, The [Stratēgikon](#), for comments about the Byzantine Greek term, skala (“step, staircase, ladder”).
2. The earliest known “treed” saddles were discovered in burial chambers at Pazyryk in southern Siberia, dated to the 5th century BCE: Sergei I. Rudenko, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia: The Pazyryk Burials of Iron Age Horsemen*, translated by M.W. Thompson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970).
3. For example, there is no firm evidence that the Welsh used saddles before the Vikings arrived in the 9th century. See Mark Redknapp, “Ring Rattle on Swift Steeds: Equestrian Equipment from Early Medieval Wales,” in *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World: Studies in Honour of James Graham-Campbell*, edited by Andrew Reynolds and Leslie E. Webster (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 177-210 (p. 202). The Irish may have continued to use pads rather than structured saddles for considerably longer.
4. Experimental reconstructions were made by Peter Connolly and then thoroughly tested by Ann Hyland on her own horses. Connolly, “Reconstruction of a Roman Saddle,” *Britannia* 17 (1986), 353-55 (drawings, p. 354). Hyland, *The*

If this is the case, then what is the big deal about stirrups?

Mounted Shock Combat

“Mounted combat” can mean many things. “Cavalry” can mean even more. “Light” cavalry may mean lightly armoured warriors on fast, agile horses, often using projectile weapons such as arrows or javelins. They may be used to support infantry units, sometimes by harrying the enemy troops in quick forays, or by pursuing retreating foes at speed. “Heavy” cavalry usually refers to more heavily armoured warriors, using closer-combat weapons, perhaps on more powerful horses and often used in massed groups to charge at or encircle the enemy. These terms are relative and vary according to place and time. The historiography of cavalry warfare is enormous and will not be entered into here in any great detail.⁵ It is abundantly clear that fighting from horseback (as opposed to just riding to the battlefield and then dismounting) long precedes stirrup-use and can involve a wide range of combat styles that were once believed to require stirrups.

Where stirrups seem to have made the greatest difference in European military practice is in the development of a technique that is generally known as “mounted shock combat.” Simply put, this refers to holding a lance (a long, heavy thrusting spear) tucked firmly under the arm in a horizontal position and then galloping forward so that the combined weight and momentum of horse and rider drive the weapon into an opponent. The “shock” is not only on the receiving end, but also in the impact transmitted to the lancer who would be unseated without the bracing effect of stirrups. Note that properly speaking this is a mounted knight against mounted knight tactic, rather than a cavalry against infantry one.⁶

Medieval Warhorse: From Byzantium to the Crusades (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994), 5-6 (with photographs). There is some interesting discussion of Connolly’s prototypes, with abundant photographs, available on the Comitatus Roman re-enactment society website: <http://www.comitatus.net/cavalrycanter3.html>

5. An excellent starting point for further reading, despite its publication date, is still Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, translated by Michael Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

6. Matthew Bennett, “The Medieval Warhorse Reconsidered,” in *Medieval Knighthood V: Papers from the Sixth Strawberry Hill Conference 1994*, edited by Stephen Church and Ruth Harvey (Cambridge: Boydell, 1995), 19-40 (esp. p. 34).



Figure 7.11 William Marshall unseats an opponent, from Matthew Paris, *Chronica maiora* II, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 16ii, fol. 88r. (Digitized by Parker Library on the Web: Manuscripts in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge).

Like most things, this distinctive type of mounted shock combat did not come into being all at once. Military historians continue to disagree about exactly which group first used the couched-lance technique in its fully developed form and it is important to observe that lances continued to be used in a range of different modes even after the couched position can be clearly recognized in artwork and literary descriptions.⁷ Some argue that the Frankish forces of Charlemagne's time (or even earlier, under Charles Martel in the early 8th century) were the innovators, but we have seen in the "Origin and Spread" section that the evidence for stirrup-use in Central or Western Europe is very limited until well into the 9th century. Ann Hyland regards the Battle of Lechfeld in 955, where the German emperor Otto the Great used eight divisions of heavy cavalry to defeat the Magyar horse-archers, as likely to be the first instance of Western Europeans employing true shock cavalry warfare.⁸ Others credit the Normans in the later 10th or the 11th century with exploiting the combination of stirrups and couched lance for the first time. Even on the Bayeux Tapestry of the 1080s, however, not all the Norman knights have stirrups and those that do are deploying their lances as javelins (throwing them in an over-arm motion) or stabbing them diagonally downwards at infantry and fallen opponents, as well as using the horizontal couched position.⁹ Because of this, some historians believe that the full shock combat style did not crystalize until the First Crusade (1096-1144), by which time it is difficult to pin the invention on the Normans versus the other (non-Norman) French or indeed the Germans. It is also sometimes argued that stirrups-plus-couched-lance were still not enough and that double-girthing (having two large straps securing the saddle tightly to the horse instead of only one) was also necessary for fully-fledged mounted shock combat—and

7. A thorough discussion, with pictures, is Matthew Strickland, "Military Technology and Conquest: The Anomaly of Anglo-Saxon England," in *Anglo-Norman Studies XIX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1996*, edited by Christopher Harper-Brill (Cambridge: Boydell, 1997), 353-82.

8. Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse*, 51.

9. The Bayeux Tapestry's embroidered panels can be viewed easily on Wikipedia, especially under "Bayeux Tapestry tituli" (captions): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayeux_Tapestry_tituli

such girthing seems to have been a 12th-century development.¹⁰ There are other technical challenges too, particularly the strain on a knight's arm caused by holding a lance horizontally and, of course, coping with the force of the impact. This led to various forms of support (fewters or lance-rests) to help steady the lance or to halt its "kickback" motion; these could be fastened to the saddle or to the knight's breastplate.

In any case, once it finally all came together, certainly no later than the First Crusade, the mounted shock combat package was distinctive and terrifying enough to provoke commentary from both the Byzantines and the Muslims of the Middle East. In her history of her father's reign, *The Alexiad* (written in the late 1140s), Anna Comnena, daughter of the Byzantine emperor Alexios I, described the Western knights' special military skills and equipment. Note that, like Muslim observers, she calls all Western Europeans "Franks," although the leader of the particular contingent described here was in fact a Norman lord from southern Italy, Bohemond of Taranto:

He [the Emperor] furnished them abundantly with arrows and exhorted them not to use them sparingly, but to shoot at the horses rather than at the Franks. For he knew that the Franks were difficult to wound, or rather, practically invulnerable, thanks to their breastplates and coats of mail. Therefore, he considered shooting at them useless and quite senseless. For the Frankish weapon of defence is this coat of mail, ring plaited into ring, and the iron fabric is such excellent iron that it repels arrows and keeps the wearer's skin unhurt. An additional weapon of defence is a shield which is not round, but a long shield, very broad at the top and running out to a point, hollowed out slightly inside, but externally smooth and gleaming with a brilliant boss of molten brass. Consequently, any arrow, be it Scythian or Persian, or even discharged by the arms of a giant, would glint off such a shield and hark back to the sender. For this reason, as he was cognizant both of Frankish armour and our archery, the Emperor advised our men to attack the horses chiefly and 'wing' them with their arrows so that when the Franks had dismounted, they could easily be captured. **For a Frank on horseback is invincible, and would even make a hole in the walls of Babylon, but directly he gets off his horse, anyone who likes can make sport of him.**(emphasis added)¹¹

Clearly, the Western knights packed a powerful punch. Their skills with the lance were striking.¹² However, it is important to pay attention to the logical sequence of equestrian technologies here (not to mention various difficulties to do with limited evidence for ascertaining precise dates and with interpreting artistic evidence). The adoption of stirrups perhaps led to the ability to wield a particular kind of lance in a new way that gave it formidable impact, literally. This has often been seen as a revolutionary change in medieval warfare. Yet, as we have seen, the first step—the adoption of stirrups—took something on the order of 200 years to become widespread among the earlier Europeans to take it up: the Franks, various Central European German groups, Scandinavians, Normans. Note also that Eastern Europe had fresh influxes of stirrup-using steppe populations in the regions that became Bulgaria (7th century) and Hungary (10th century), yet claims for the invention of mounted shock combat do not typically look there (because mounted warfare in steppe cultures normally involved high-speed skirmishing on light horses, using mostly archers); clearly stirrups do not necessarily lead to couched lances. Stirrups then continued to spread more widely from the 10th century, but do not seem to be routine items of Western European cavalry equipment until the 11th. During this extended period of time, assorted adjustments and innovations in

10. Bennett, "The Medieval Warhorse Reconsidered," 34. Also, Rob Webley at the University of Exeter "Warhorse" project (pers. comm., Oct. 2020); see <https://medievalwarhorse.exeter.ac.uk/>

11. Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, book 13, section 8, at the Internet Medieval Sourcebook: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/AnnaComnena-Alexiad13.asp>

12. Just as with stirrups, one must be careful of placing too much emphasis on the couched lance as a transformative factor. See Strickland, 361-66. Pamela Kyle Crossley's view on stirrups—that they allow more warriors to be turned into cavalry because they are an aid for less accomplished (but still good) riders might apply in connection with using the couched lance too. That is: maybe more knights (and not just the very best ones) could manage the lance if they had stirrups (see *Origins* and *Spread* in this module).

the use of spears of various kinds were also going on. Saddles were changing too. Yet is not until, roughly, the turn of the 11th century to the 12th that we can be sure that the whole technological package had come together enough to represent something impressively advanced. The point is that all these improvements happened gradually, and at different speeds in different places. This has been recognized and argued since at least the mid 1990s, but even so sometimes new, fairly general publications still present a picture of a sudden and transformative technological change from the moment when Western Europeans began using stirrups. This is in fact profoundly misleading and hearkens back to a well-known historiographical debate known as “the Great Stirrup Controversy.”

Questions for Consideration

1. For what other types of medieval technology might it be useful to conduct practical experiments using reconstructions?
2. Can you think of other technological “break-throughs” that took a long time to have a widespread impact?

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The Great Stirrup Controversy

JESSICA HEMMING

Some Useful Concepts

“Historiography” is a broad term that refers to the writing down of history (which may be done by historians of the distant past as well as by modern scholars), to the study of such historical writings, or—more generally—to academic discussion and debate about historical matters of various kinds. In this last situation, the term **“historiographical debate”** is often used, especially where there is considerable disagreement amongst scholars on how particular historical data should be interpreted and understood.

“Determinism,” appearing by itself in the dictionary is typically defined as a position held within the discipline of philosophy. However, in the context of the academic study of history, it means something rather different, and usually has an adjective in front of it, such as “economic determinism.” It refers to a tendency to explain complex phenomena or largescale historical processes by means of one category of factors that determine certain types of change. To use the same example, “economic determinism” would explain historical patterns and events as having been driven primarily by economic forces. Thus, economic explanations would be considered more important than explanations based on religious change or intellectual developments and so on. In the discipline of history, “determinism” often carries a slightly negative connotation and has frequently been used as an accusation of over-reliance on one category of evidence. The criticism often implies an oversimplification of historical events and processes, even when the “determining” category of analysis is itself highly complex (like economics).

In this section, we will be looking at a famous twentieth-century **historiographical debate** that hinged on charges of **technological determinism** and continued to resurface for some thirty years. This debate, the so-called “Great Stirrup Controversy,” is an excellent example because it is relatively simple, focused, and easy to understand.

The Claim

In 1962 the distinguished American historian Lynn White, Jr (1907-87), published an important book entitled *Medieval Technology and Social Change*. His overall thesis was that certain key technological developments in the Middle Ages had provoked significant changes on a much larger scale than previously thought. One of his chapters focused on the adoption of the stirrup in Western Europe.¹ In it he argued that this technological innovation was a kind of trigger that led to the emergence of a set of social arrangements often referred to as **feudalism**.

“Feudalism” itself has been a contested concept for some decades now,² but in the 1960s it was still routinely used to describe a system of relationships between noblemen and their warrior subordinates (**vassals**). In the feudal arrangement,

1. Lynn White, “Stirrup, Mounted Combat, Feudalism, and Chivalry,” in *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 1-38. Read this beautifully written argument with caution, preferably in conjunction with the article by Alex Roland listed and annotated in the Sources section of this module: Alex Roland, “Once More into the Stirrups: Lynn White jr. *Medieval Technology and Social Change*,” *Technology and Culture* 44, no. 3 (July 2003), 574-85. It is easy to be convinced by White because his writing was so good.
2. See “Feudalism? An Essay on the Problem,” plus some associated reviews and documents, at the Internet Medieval Sourcebook: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/sbookli.asp#Feudalism>

the **lord** (the higher-ranking person, starting at the top with the king) gave a land grant known as a **fief** (Latin *feudum*, hence “feudal”) to the vassal in return for military service and an oath of personal loyalty (**homage**). Thus, the arrangement involved formalized social bonds, a distinctive type of land tenure, and a means of organizing military manpower, all in the context of a society where centralized state authority and governmental structures were limited. It was also a ladder hierarchy, where except at the very top (the king) and very bottom (the humblest knights), each lord was simultaneously a vassal to someone above him and each vassal was a lord to someone below. Furthermore, in most cases, there was an expectation that the vassal would be able to equip himself as a mounted warrior—a cavalryman, or what we think of in general terms as a **knight**.

The origins of this strikingly distinctive kind of arrangement—that is, of “feudalism”—had been the subject of intense historical research for a long while by the time White’s book appeared. Many historians had presented theories accounting for how, when, and where feudal practices began because feudalism was regarded as one of the defining features of medieval European civilization. In other words, it was a very big research topic. There was a vague consensus, or at least a common view, that feudalism emerged in its earliest forms among the **Franks**, perhaps at some stage during the changeover from the **Merovingian** to **Carolingian** periods.³ This put its origins generally in the regions of Western Europe that are now parts of France and Germany, in roughly the eighth century. Whether the primary motivating factors giving rise to this new social structure were political, social, or military was hotly debated. Those historians who leaned more toward military explanations were especially interested in looking for the roots of feudalism in the expansion and development of Frankish armies under the ruler **Charles Martel** (died 741 CE), from whom the “Carolingian” dynasty took its name.

White was among these historians and he believed he had found the answer. His bold contention was that in the 730s Charles Martel became aware of a new technological arrival that had not yet been appreciated by his contemporaries: the stirrup. Recognizing its revolutionary potential as a means of bracing a rider so that he could use a lance with much greater force, he realized that a newly effective type of mounted combat was suddenly possible. This led swiftly (White argued) to a shift among the Frankish forces from a preponderance of infantry to one of cavalry; to a development of the “Carolingian wing-spear” as the major weapon for these improved mounted fighters; and to a need to supply warriors with grants of suitable land on which to raise and maintain warhorses. Thus, in White’s view, Charles Martel essentially invented feudalism because the stirrup made cavalry vastly more effective and important. Over the next two generations, the Carolingians then spread feudalism (and stirrups) over much of the rest of Europe. At the end of the chapter, White asserts his central, technology-based, claim: “Few inventions have been so simple as the stirrup, but few have had so catalytic an influence on history.” In the same concluding paragraph, we find an example of one of his characteristic rhetorical flourishes: “Man on Horseback, as we have known him during the past millennium, was made possible by the stirrup, which joined man and steed into a fighting organism. Antiquity imagined the Centaur; the early Middle Ages made him the master of Europe.”⁴ This statement has been much quoted because of its vivid imagery, but fundamentally it is not true.

The Reaction

While there were certainly some positive responses to White’s essay, especially in praise of the boldness and originality of the argument, negative critiques also came quickly. The first was a strongly critical review article by Peter Sawyer,

3. See the module on [The Early Carolingians](#) for an explanation of these terms. For a brief, clear summary of the historiography of the quest for feudal origins leading up to White’s contribution in 1962, see Kelly DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1992), especially the chapter entitled “The Stirrup, Mounted Shock Combat, Chivalry, and Feudalism,” 95–110.
4. White, 38. A centaur is a mythological creature from Greek and Roman mythology, with the upper body of a human joined to the whole body of a horse where the horse’s neck would normally begin.

who accused White of “**technical determinism**,” among many other failings.⁵ Despite this and some other published challenges to White’s thesis and methods, his main argument was not seriously undermined by means of contrary evidence until 1970 when two new key publications on the subject appeared, one by D.A. Bullough and another by Bernard S. Bachrach.⁶ Between them, these two articles presented extensive primary-source evidence that largely demolished the support that White had put forward for his theory. Bachrach’s lengthy article, in particular, dismantled White’s points one by one and so meticulously that the debate basically went quiet.

Kelly DeVries’s chapter (see footnote 3) gives a detailed summary of Bachrach’s critique as part of his clear and useful survey of the history of the controversy. He notes that “Bullough’s and Bachrach’s criticisms were not later answered by Lynn White, nor has any other historian risen to White’s defense” (as of 1992).⁷ Historians did continue to talk about various aspects of the role of the stirrup in changes in mounted warfare, but nobody resurrected White’s causal argument. Also, these later discussions were much calmer than the initial burst of vigorous claim and counter-claim, which had included some fairly emotive statements of position and accusations of flawed scholarship. It was this initial flair-up which had led to the popular designation of the argument as “the Great Stirrup Controversy.”

One well-known example of this more measured reaction from a major scholar was the discussion by Philippe Contamine in his influential book *War in the Middle Ages* (first published in French in 1980). In a section called “The Problem of the Stirrup,” Contamine responds cautiously to Lynn White and others, stressing that any argument about sudden changes in quantity or style of early medieval cavalry is probably wrong because these processes would have been slow and uneven. He accepts a greater role for cavalry in parts of Western Europe by Charlemagne’s time (late 8th century CE), but cautions that even by the mid to late 11th century the stirrup and the powerful couched lance position that it makes possible seem both to have been only patchily used. For instance, the Anglo-Saxons demonstrably knew of stirrups but did not use them when they faced the Normans at the Battle of Hastings. Furthermore, the Bayeux Tapestry (c.1080, which shows stirrups) and the Old French heroic epic called the *Chanson de Roland*, written down about the same time, both seem to indicate that Norman and French cavalry were still throwing overhand and stabbing with their lances rather than always couching them even by the late 11th century. Thus, he argues for a slow uptake of the stirrup and equally slow implementation of its full technical advantages.⁸ By the middle of the 1990s, specialists were quite clear that there was no going back to the position that stirrups somehow “changed everything,” whether in strictly military or in broader social terms. Two especially good examples which contextualize the debate and lay it gently to rest include an article on warhorses by Matthew Bennett (1995) and one on Anglo-Saxon and Norman military technology by Matthew Strickland (1997). Bennett, a military historian, encapsulates the state of the topic succinctly on a single page, saying:

Another contribution to the myth of the overwhelming superiority of the knightly charge is due to the concentration by historians upon the importance of the stirrup. It used to be thought that the rise of the Carolingian empire was based upon (not just owed much to) the introduction of stirrup-equipped, lance-armed cavalry in the mid-eighth century.... Yet, from all pictorial evidence, the stirrup was not in use in the West until at least a century later. ... Nor does the stirrup, in fact, make a crucial difference in the use of the lance. Recent work on the Roman saddle has pointed out that its four-horned construction gives a perfectly secure seat for wielding lance and shield.⁹

That last sentence refers to Ann Hyland’s landmark book on warhorses (which had been published while Bennett was working on his article) and to experimental work done by Roman military expert Peter Connolly who had spent some

5. R.H. Hilton and P.H. Sawyer, “Technical Determinism: The Stirrup and the Plough,” *Past & Present* 24 (1963), 90-100.

Hilton wrote the section on the plough, Sawyer the section on the stirrup.

6. D.A. Bullough, “Europae Pater: Charlemagne and His Achievement in the Light of Recent Scholarship,” *English Historical Review* 85, no. 334 (January 1970), 59-105; Bernard S. Bachrach, “Charles Martel, Mounted Shock Combat, the Stirrup, and Feudalism,” *Studies in Medieval & Renaissance History* 7 (1970), 47-75.

7. DeVries, 110. This chapter is very good for sources dealing with the stirrup controversy up to 1992.

8. Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, translated by Michael Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 179-84.

9. Matthew Bennett, “The Medieval Warhorse Reconsidered,” in *Medieval Knighthood V: Papers from the Sixth Strawberry Hill Conference 1994*, edited by Stephen Church and Ruth Harvey (Cambridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 19-40 (34).

years painstakingly reconstructing Roman cavalry saddles based on archaeological finds. Connolly had published his first successful result in 1986 and Hyland—an expert horsewoman as well as a historian—had used one of his reconstructed saddles on her own horse to test how much stability it provided for a rider. Between them Connolly and Hyland conclusively demonstrated that stirrups are not necessary for high-impact mounted combat, including thrusting with a heavy lance.¹⁰

Strickland's article two years later reinforced this conclusion, making it clear that a new consensus about stirrups had been reached: "Just as it is now recognized that the stirrup spread only gradually after its appearance in Western Europe, so I would argue that the 'invention' of the couched lance—itself an inherently implausible idea—is a chimera" (emphasis added).¹¹ He also alludes once more to the dangers of excessive determinism. In speaking of the longstanding emphasis on the massed cavalry charge, he says: "This is not to dismiss the charge with the couched lance, which was undoubtedly very effective, but rather to challenge its use as a *deus ex machina* of technical determinism to explain social or military change."¹² In some ways, it is surprising that in 1997—twenty-seven years after the demolition of Lynn White's argument—it was still necessary for a military historian to state this in a specialist publication. It seems that White's ideas were hard to relinquish.

The Afterlife

One would think that this would be the end of the story. The fixation on stirrups did indeed settle down, at least among experts. However, despite the heated debate from 1962 to 1970, followed by the consolidation of a revised position based on new evidence in the 1990s—including conclusive practical demonstrations with reproduction equipment—sometimes scholars today still make statements about the adoption of stirrups in Carolingian Europe that reflect the influence of White's original argument rather uncritically. Consider this passage from a brand-new edition of a well-respected undergraduate history textbook, speaking of how the ancient warband bonds between mounted warriors and their lords developed into the medieval system of relationships known as **vassalage**:

By the early eighth century, a technological advance—the use of the stirrup—gave renewed importance to these past methods of creating bonds between men. The stirrup made it possible for a soldier to fight with confidence on a horse ... and it had two direct effects: first, a strategic reliance on cavalry instead of infantry, and second, a new class of full-time fighters. Before the stirrup, all freemen had been both peasants and warriors; after the stirrup, horse-borne soldiers needed so much equipment and training that fighting became a career. These professional soldiers (or knights) needed to be supported—fed and housed, of course, but also equipped with horses, weapons, and protective armor and trained in their use. Vassalage answered that need. Wealthy men in need of soldiers (lords) promised to support and protect the men under their command (vassals).¹³

This is very close indeed to Lynn White's formulation of the stirrup as the **technological determinant** of the development

10. Peter Connolly, "A Reconstruction of a Roman Saddle," *Britannia* 17 (1986), 353-55; Ann Hyland, *The Medieval Warhorse: From Byzantium to the Crusades* (Stroud: Sutton, 1994). Both are illustrated.
11. Matthew Strickland, "Military Technology and Conquest: The Anomaly of Anglo-Saxon England," in *Anglo-Norman Studies XIX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1996*, edited by Christopher Harper-Brill (Cambridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 353-82 (361). By "chimera" he means, metaphorically, a mirage or phantom—something unreal that only seems to be there (the chimera was a fabulous monster of Greek mythology). In this article Strickland praises the work (at the time very new) of both Bennett and Hyland.
12. Strickland, 366.
13. Judith M. Bennett and Sandy Bardsley, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 12th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 150-51. The authors explain some of the problems with the term "feudalism" in the immediately preceding paragraph.

of feudalism except that “vassalage” takes the place of the vexed term “feudalism.” It also returns to an insistence on the stirrup as a necessary item to secure a rider in the saddle.

What is a student of medieval history to make of this? Here there is an important distinction to make. The supposed requirement of stirrups to give a mounted warrior a firm seat has been disproved. The contention was disprovable because it was based on something that could be tested through practical means. The argument concerning the role of technical developments in the emergence of new socio-military structures, on the other hand, is more complex and subject to a range of interpretations of the historical and archaeological data. Such large, multifaceted questions are much more difficult to resolve. While most military historians with expertise in the history of horsemanship would probably now reject the focus on the stirrup as the transformative item, the question of the origins of “feudal” forms of social organization is still an active area of research for specialists in a range of different historical subdisciplines. To cite one recent example, Hyun Jin Kim argues that the roots of many early medieval European socio-political structures, as well as military practices, lie in Inner Asian traditions brought westwards by the repeated incursions of steppe peoples from the fifth century CE onwards.¹⁴ Although compared to the older approaches this may sound like a wildly unusual proposition, it should be contextualized as part of a growing awareness among historians that the socio-cultural impact of nomadic groups from the Eurasian steppes upon sedentary states and peoples in both Asia and Europe has been much more extensive and profound than previously recognized.¹⁵ This is another lesson about **historiography**: the study of history is dynamic and ever-changing. There is always more to learn, more to find out, more dots to join up. We will never know all that there is to know.

Questions for Consideration

1. Has the Great Stirrup Controversy become irrelevant as a result of more recent research?
2. Archaeological reconstructions of equipment, domestic objects, weapons, and settlements are increasingly used to test historical hypotheses (and assumptions) about how items of material culture may have functioned in real life. Can you find some other examples on the web (besides the Roman saddles discussed above)?
3. Why do you think historians are still arguing about the origins of “feudalism” when so many of them no longer think the term has any validity?

14. Hyun Jin Kim, *The Huns, Rome, and the Birth of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); see especially chapter six, “The Later Huns and the Birth of Europe,” where he explicitly discusses “feudalism” (he puts it in quotation marks too).
15. See Pamela Kyle Crossley, *Hammer and Anvil: Nomad Rulers at the Forge of the Modern World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). This is a challenging and thought-provoking book.

Sources & Suggestions for Further Research

JESSICA HEMMING

Further Reading

*Note that this section demonstrates best practices for the creation of an annotated bibliography

Bennett, Matthew. "The Medieval Warhorse Reconsidered." In *Medieval Knighthood V: Papers from the Sixth Strawberry Hill Conference 1994*, edited by Stephen Church and Ruth Harvey, 19–40. Cambridge: Boydell Press, 1995.

This is a very clear article, with many illustrations, which builds on and updates work done by R.H.C. Davies (see below) on medieval warhorses. Bennett discusses weapons and tack, but focuses especially on the horses themselves and what can be done with a horse in combat. He provides a succinct assessment of stirrups, saddles, and couched lances.

Contamine, Philippe. *War in the Middle Ages*. Translated by Michael Jones. Oxford: Blackwell, 1984. First published in French in 1980.

In a section called "The Problem of the Stirrup" (pp. 179–84), Contamine responds cautiously to Lynn White and others, stressing that any argument about *sudden* changes in quantity or style of early medieval cavalry is probably wrong because these processes would have been slow and patchy. He accepts a greater role for cavalry by Charlemagne's time (late 8th century CE), but cautions that even by the mid to late 11th century the stirrup and the powerful couched lance position that it makes possible seem both to have been only patchily used: e.g. the Anglo-Saxons knew of stirrups but did not use them when they faced the stirrured Normans at the Battle of Hastings. Furthermore, the Bayeux Tapestry (c.1080, which shows stirrups) and the *Chanson de Roland* both indicate that Norman and Frankish/French cavalry were still throwing and stabbing with their lances rather than always couching them in the late 11th century. Thus his key argument is about a *slow* uptake of the stirrup and slow implementation of its full technical advantage.

Curta, Florin. "The Earliest Avar-Age Stirrups, or the 'Stirrup Controversy' Revisited." In *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans*, edited by Florin Curta with the assistance of Roman Kovalev, 297–326. East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, vol. 2. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

This volume as a whole focuses on the often undervalued contributions of four groups of steppe peoples to the history of the Eastern European region. Curta's article offers extensive archaeological evidence (with several illustrations) for the presence of Avar-style metal stirrups in Central Europe in the first half of the 7th century, thus providing substantial new material culture data to contribute to the controversy. His stated main purpose is to correct the chronology of European stirrups, but he remains cautious about exactly what effect the stirrup had on either Avar or Frankish military practices. This article is an excellent example of how to incorporate archaeological data into a historical analysis. It also benefits from wide reading in Eastern European and Russian scholarship.

Davis, R.H.C. *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1989.

This was a groundbreaking book at the time and remains extremely informative despite being outdated in some respects. Davis was one of the first historians of medieval chivalry to actually take a serious look at the horses themselves, as opposed to the knights, the battle tactics, feudal relationships, and other social and military matters. His study was then supplemented by the practical experiments done by Ann Hyland (see below). The most important correction to his study has to do with the notion of extremely large, heavy horses being used at the height of the Middle Ages. It is generally agreed now that the size of the medieval warhorse was more moderate. The University of Exeter project on medieval English warhorses, which began in 2020, provides an excellent current follow up: <http://medievalwarhorse.exeter.ac.uk/>

DeVries, Kelly. *Medieval Military Technology*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1992.

In a chapter called “The Stirrup, Mounted Shock Combat, Chivalry, and Feudalism” (pp. 95-110), DeVries spells out the stirrup controversy with great clarity, focusing particularly on the argument over whether stirrups contributed ultimately to the rise of feudalism by causing a dramatic shift in use, numbers, or style of cavalry. He gives a nicely clear summary and explanation of Heinrich Brunner (1874) then Lynn White, Jr. (his famous book of 1962), and then the critiques by P. H. Sawyer (1963, which DeVries finds excessively harsh and emotional), J. D. A. Ogilvy (1966, which DeVries describes as ill-informed and says “probably should not have been published,” p. 104), D. A. Bullough (1970, which seriously undermined White’s thesis), and Bernard S. Bachrach (1970, which delivered another serious blow). He ends inconclusively, noting that nobody (by the time of writing, in 1992) had rebutted Bullough or Bachrach, nor resurrected White’s thesis. He presents no opinion of his own on any aspect of the matter.

Dien, Albert E. “The Stirrup and its Effect on Chinese Military History.” *Ars Orientalis* 16 (1986): 35-56. Reprinted as Chapter 9 in *Warfare in China to 1600*, edited by Peter Lorge, 185-208. London: Routledge, 2005.

This is a classic article with much careful assessment of dates, many references, and many pictures. Dien does not criticize Lynn White’s thesis at all, although he opens with it. He confirms the dates of two early Jin period ceramic figurines of saddled horses with stirrups (302 and 322 CE), thus proving that some kind of stirrup was known in China long before the commonly-cited date of c.500 CE. Dien raises interesting questions about the various reasons why the stirrup would be invented by equestrian nomadic steppe warriors, or by mountain peoples, or by sedentary cultures that did not have such spectacular equestrian skills (like the Chinese—who might need more help with riding than expert steppe riders would). He also raises the possibility that a single, so-called mounting stirrup on only the left side of the saddle might assist in bracing a right-handed mounted archer. Consultation with professional riders suggests that this is unlikely.

Goodrich, Chauncey S. “Riding Astride and the Saddle in Ancient China.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44, no. 2 (1984): 279-306. Reprinted (in facsimile with original pagination) as Chapter 8 in *Warfare in China to 1600*, edited by Peter Lorge, 146-84. London: Routledge, 2005.

In note 69 Goodrich says that his attention has been recently drawn to an Eastern Han period bronze plaque unearthed in China in 1979 that shows a saddle with stirrups. The reference is to an article of 1983 in Chinese, but Goodrich says that the plaque’s date would be 1st or 2nd century CE. The Chinese author (Feng Chou) ascribes the invention of stirrups to “steppe-nomads, in particular the Hsiung-nu” (original p. 303/reprint p. 169)—that is, not to the Chinese themselves. The Hsiung-nu (Xiongnu) were a confederation of eastern steppe peoples who had an empire in the region of modern Mongolia from the 3rd century BCE to c.200 CE. Scholars continue to argue over whether they are to be identified with the later Huns.

Gorelik, Michael. “Arms and Armour in South-Eastern Europe in the Second Half of the First Millennium AD.” In *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, edited by David Nicolle, 127-47. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002.

Gorelik states (p. 130) that stirrups were invented in northern China, then introduced to Europe by the Avars.

This is a fairly standard position, but ignores the scholarly debates over exactly who invented the stirrup. There are several pages of detailed drawings by Gorelik himself in the plates section at the back of the book. Plate XI-9 shows many stirrups, identified by date and location in the accompanying caption.

Haldon, John. "Some Aspects of Early Byzantine Arms and Armour." In *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, edited by David Nicolle, 65-79. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002.

Haldon states that the stirrup was introduced to Europe by the Avars "who ultimately brought it from the eastern steppes and China" (p. 66). This is a very measured way of describing the place of origin of the full stirrup, as it is currently impossible to be more precise. Haldon also finds the multiple references to the Avars in the *Stratēgikon* to be indicative of especially strong Avar influence on Byzantine cavalry practices in the late 6th century.

Hyland, Ann. *The Medieval Warhorse: From Byzantium to the Crusades*. Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994.

Hyland's books on the history of the military use of horses revolutionized the understanding of many aspects of ancient and medieval equestrianism. Her distinctive contribution rests on the fact that, unlike nearly all scholars who studied the topic before her, she is a professional rider and horse-trainer with practical knowledge of horses' capabilities. As part of her study of pre-modern horsemanship, she has experimented extensively with reproduction ancient and medieval equipment (saddles, bridles, and so on) on her own horses. Her experiments with "horned" Roman saddles proved that a cavalry rider can use a thrusting spear effectively without stirrups if the saddle is sufficiently supportive (pp. 4-6). Those interested in the subject will enjoy Hyland's *Equus: The Horse in the Roman World* (1990) and *The Warhorse, 1250-1600* (1998).

Nickel, Helmut. "The Mutual Influence of Europe and Asia in the Field of Arms and Armour." In *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, edited by David Nicolle, 107-25. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002.

Stirrups appear only on p. 108 (plus an image in the plates section at the back of the book), but Nickel gives abundant references. He notes that it is commonly asserted that the stirrup was invented by the Chinese c.500. He argues that "Scythians of the Ukrainian steppes as early as c.400 BC" might have had stirrups of some kind, based on what seems to be a representation of hook-like stirrups on a carved golden torque (neck ring) of this date from a Crimean kurgan (burial mound). There is a drawing of this object (plate X-5).

Pohl, Walter. *The Avars: A Steppe Empire in Central Europe, 567-822*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018.

This important book is a monumental study of the Avars (thoroughly updated and translated from the German first edition of 1988), a steppe people of great significance to the history of medieval Central and South-Eastern Europe. Among other things, the Avars introduced stirrups to Europe.

Roland, Alex. "Once More into the Stirrups: Lynn White jr. *Medieval Technology and Social Change*." *Technology and Culture* 44, no. 3 (July 2003): 574-85.

This is a review and reassessment of Lynn White's influential but controversial 1962 book and the critical reaction to it. It is very level-headed and more recent than DeVries (although Roland praises DeVries's summary for its clarity and usefulness). Roland also praises Contamine's cautious comments in *War in the Middle Ages* (1980, 1984). His assessment is that White's classic is still worth reading, but that students should be given contextual cautions. He also makes the interesting comments that White's article was a modified public lecture (an oral form which lends itself to hyperbole and rhetorical flourishes) and that White was too skillful a writer for his own good, in some ways.

Sloan, John. "The Stirrup Controversy." Posted on discussion list medieval@ukanvm.cc.ukans.edu, 5 October

1994. Accessible at the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, edited by Paul Halsall, 1996.
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/med/sloan.asp>

This is not an article, but an informal contribution to an academic discussion list and it does have quite a few typographical errors (“typos”). It nevertheless provides a useful review of the state of the stirrup controversy by the mid-1990s. Unlike DeVries, Sloan takes a stand on the debate. Focusing primarily on the technical military aspects, he criticizes a number of White’s points and gives a helpful annotated list of references to relevant publications by a range of military historians. This is a reliable piece of writing by a scholar, but in general it is wise to be wary of social media sources unless you can be of sure of the qualifications of the authors. The stirrup controversy has a large online presence, not all of it worth reading.

White, Lynn, Jr. *Medieval Technology and Social Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

This is the book that started the Great Stirrup Controversy, even though it builds on the earlier work of Heinrich Brunner (1874). Note that White’s stirrup theory does not take up the whole book, the overarching thesis of which is that certain key technological innovations in the Middle Ages triggered major social changes. His famously provocative argument about the stirrup connects its adoption by the Franks (specifically Charles Martel in the early 730s CE) to the development of feudalism, thus attributing a notoriously complex and variable social system to the sequence of changes set in motion by the acquisition of a simple technology at a precise point in time. Ideally, students should read this highly stimulating book in conjunction with DeVries’ chapter on stirrups in *Medieval Military Technology* (1992), as many of White’s specific points have been comprehensively demolished and his overall argument is vulnerable to accusations of determinism.

Sources

Primary Sources:

Dennis, George T., trans. *Maurice’s Stratēgikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.

Panel from the Bayeux Tapestry, c.1080. “File: Odo bayeux tapestry.png.” Wikimedia Commons, 3 April 2018.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayeux_Tapestry#/media/File:Odo_bayeux_tapestry.png Public domain.

Glossary

abideth

to abide

admonition

counsel, advice

Aegypt

'Egypt' in byzantine times

aforesaid

aforementioned

al-Madina

Arabic: "the city"

Alemanni

a confederation of Germanic-speaking tribes in the area of southern Germany just north of the Alps, including Lake Constance in modern Austria. They were known to the Romans, nominally conquered by the Franks, and eventually gave their name to several languages as the generic term for "Germans" and "Germany" (e.g. French les allemands and L'Allemagne)

amphitheatre

An ancient Roman structure, featuring a large central arena surrounded by many seats for spectators.

antipathy

a feeling of hatred or animosity

Apology

Also, apologetics. A defence or an explanation of Christianity.

apostate

a person who abandons or turns from religious principles

apostatized

abandoning religious or political beliefs

Apparitions

the appearance of something supernatural or extraordinary

arrogated

To claim or appropriate, usually falsely

assent

side with

Austrasian

The easternmost Frankish territory

avaricious

extreme greed

Avars

a Turkic-speaking people from the Eurasian steppe who in the late 560s established an empire centred on the Pannonian Plain of the Carpathian Basin region (modern Hungary, mostly); they were defeated by Charlemagne c.800 and their state dissolved

bedewed

cover with water

beseeching

to ask urgently, to implore

betokened

to warn of something

bewailed

to express deep disappointment

bishopric

title / office of bishop

bough

a branch

bowels

intestines

carbuncle

a boil or swelling that is infected

catechumen

A convert to Christianity, often young

chlamys

a cloak worn in ancient Roman times

clappers

a metal used to strike a bell in order to make sound

commendatio

a formal ceremony to create a bond between a lord and his fighting man

commodious

convenient, comfortable

compunction

guilt and regret

confers

bestows, grants

congregation

a gathering or assembly of common individuals

consecrated

to become a part of something sacred (religious generally)

constancy

being faithful and resolute in belief

contumacy

insubordination, refusal to obey

corporal pains

Physical suffering and pains on the human body

couched

firmly tucked under the arm and held horizontally for direct frontal attack

countenance

the act of accepting or admitting to something

cuboid

shaped similar to a cube

delirium

hallucination

denominated

called/named

despondency

a state of disappointment, a loss of hope

destitute

lacking important necessities

deus ex machina

Literally, “a god out of a machine,” named from the ancient Greek theatrical technique of resolving a difficult moment by having a god or goddess suddenly intervene; most often used metaphorically to describe a plot device in stories where a sudden and unlikely occurrence resolves an impossible situation

disconsolate

dejected, discouraged

domestics

a person who helps with tasks around a household

ecclesiastical

clerical, relating to the church

edifice

a large imposing structure, usually a building

embroidered

decorated with

endeavoured

to attempt to achieve something

enfeebled

made weak by something

enjoined

to urge or instruct

enmity

hostility

entreat

to ask with an emotional weight

entreaties,

A heartfelt/respectful request

episcopal

run by bishops or persons of religious background

episcopate

the title of bishop

epistle

declaration

erroneous

wrong, incorrect

estimation

An educated guess

Eucharist

consecrated elements, especially the bread, which form one of the most important rituals in the Christian faith

exhort

to encourage strongly

exhortation

a message of importance, advice

fagots

A batch of sticks

felicity

bliss, great happiness

fermented

a process that usually results in the creation of alcohol

fitna

Arabic: "trial" or "temptation", but here understood to mean the first Muslim civil war

fitter

better fit

fornication

sexual activity between individuals who are not married

forsaking

abandoning

forsook

renounce, relinquish

forthwith

immediately, without delay

frailties

weakness

fratricide

the act of one killing a member of their own family

Gaul

an area in Roman and Medieval times that contains much of modern day France

gird

fasten, secure

hadith

Arabic: "report"

impiety

A lack of obedience to God. In this case, it is specific reverence for the Roman pantheon

impious

tainted, wicked

incommode

inconvenience, disturb, disrupt

inebriated

intoxicated

infirmity

weakness of the body

intrepidity

bravery, heroism

Islam

Arabic: "submission of one's will to God"

kaisar

Caesar

languid

weak, hidden

languishing

suffering, deteriorating

lash

a sharp blow or strike, typically given using a whip

laudable

deserving of praise

lentil

a plant native to the Mediterranean region of Africa

lisp

speaking with difficulty

Lombards

a Germanic-speaking people, probably originally from northern Germany, who settled temporarily on the Pannonian Plain (modern Hungary and Slovakia) and then moved south to Italy in the 6th century CE, where they established a kingdom, 568-774

luminous

lit, glowing

Madinat al-Nabi

Arabic: "the city of the Prophet".

magnanimity,

The trait of being generous or forgiving, often with reference to an individual of higher authority and/or moral corruption

malady

disease

manifold

many / various

matron

a female caretaker of sorts

Merovingian

Rulers of the Frankish Kingdom since the late 5th Century

meted

to deal out, to assign

mosque

Arabic masjid, lit. “a place of prostration”

nativity

birth, generally referring to that of Jesus Christ

neoplatonist

A school of thought that traces its beliefs back to those of the Greek philosopher Plato

nunnery

a building / set of buildings housed by religious nuns

oblate

A person who has dedicated themselves to the service of God, but who has not yet taken formal vows

obstinacy

stubbornness

obstinate

determined, adamant, stubborn

ordained

declared, decreed

overtopping

exceeding, overshadowing

pagan

Religions with beliefs that do not involve strict principles, such as monotheism, which is central to Christian and Islamic thought. They tend to involve nature spirits, polytheistic beliefs, and be more flexible in their customs and ideas.

pallium

OED: A woollen vestment conferred by the Pope on archbishops in the Latin Church

Patriarchs

figures in history regarded as significant father figures (often used in reference to Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob)

patrimony

inherited property

perdition

eternal punishment / damnation

pestilence

disease

Phrygia

a kingdom within eastern Rome that today is located in central Turkey

pictorial

through pictures

pin

to yearn for something

princeps Francorum

Prince of the Franks

prodigious

monumental, fantastic

profaned

vulgar, blasphemous, treating something with disrespect

progeny

a descendant or descendants

propriety

the state of being correct, understanding

proscribes

to forbid, to outlaw

prostrate

lying [on the ground] facing down, often in a distressed manner

providence

an act of God's will

pustules

blisters or pimples on the skin

Qur'an

Also sometimes rendered in English as "Koran." Arabic: "recitation."

rashidun

Arabic: "rightly-guided ones"

Rasul Allah

Arabic: "the Messenger of God". "Allah" is the Arabic equivalent of the English "God".

reeve

a local official

regnum Francorum

Latin: Kingdom of the Franks

repose

Inactivity, being in a state of stillness

reprobate

a sinful, corrupt individual

respite

a period of resting and relaxation from a duty

Sahih

Arabic: "authentic" or "correct", as in a collection of authentic hadith.

scandalized

offended, horrified

sedition

treason, encouraging rebellion against an authority

see

the seat of power and jurisdiction for a bishop

shewed

old spelling of 'showed'

shorn

cut

similitudes

comparisons

smiting

attacking, striking

Smyrna,

An ancient Greek city which is today located in eastern Turkey

sophist

followers of a school of ancient greece, which favors skepticism and reason.

spake

"spoke" in ancient language

steppe

The vast grasslands that stretch approximately 5,000 miles (8,000 km) from modern Ukraine in the west to northern China in the east. There is another pocket of steppe—often called the Great Hungarian or Pannonian Plain—to the west of the Carpathian Mountains in what is now Hungary. The contact zone in the West was the Pontic-Caspian steppe north of the Black Sea.

Stoic philosophy

A popular roman philosophy that stressed the importance of virtue and maintaining good behavior

Sunna

Arabic: "way" or "path", by implication, the correct manner of behaving.

suppuration

the formation of pus

surety

someone who takes financial responsibility for someone else

sustenance

nourishment, care

tarry

stay for an extended period of time

temporal

political, earthly affairs, as opposed to spiritual

timorous

lacking confidence, apprehensive

tonsure

the shaving of a monk's hair

transient

lasting only a brief amount of time

tremulous

afraid, nervous, trembling

troublous

difficult

tumult

commotion, confusion

unbegotten

a being brought into the universe through special means

unliable

unaffected or resistant of something

usufruct

the use of the land but not its title

vapours

feelings of anxiety and general melancholy

venerable

wise and respected

veracity

accurate, truthful

virulence

the greatest extent of damage a disease can bring

wali

Governor

wanton

deliberately cruel

Contributors

Authors

Adrianna Bakos

UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY

Barrie Brill

LANGARA COLLEGE

Niall Christie

LANGARA COLLEGE

Jessica Hemming

CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE

Aleksandar Jovanovic

UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY



Dr. Tracey Kinney

KWANTLEN POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY