

Violence and Vengeance

Religion and the State

WHAT MAKES SOME SOCIETIES more violent than others? What makes some people less violent than others? Does religion reduce violence? Did violence decline with the rise of the state, government, and law? Is violence increasing, or decreasing, in the world? Are people more, or less, violent than they were a thousand years ago?

To understand what makes societies violent, and whether violence is increasing or decreasing, we must take a broad look at the past. We will select examples from a number of different societies that existed in the world between A.D. 500 and 1200. These societies will show us different causes and functions of violence and aggressive action. The examples should enable us to understand better the role of violence in human history.

None of these investigations will give us anything like mathematical certainty. History is not like that. Humans are too complex, and we cannot go back and interview the dead. Frequently, people in the past did not even bother to keep the records we would like from them. Statistics were virtually nonexistent. Most peoples did not write. In general, they did not question the same things we do.

We can, however, get a sense of who some of these peoples were and what they were like.

As you read about these societies, you might ask yourself how they are similar to, or different from, your own. In what ways were these societies of the traditional world more violent, in what ways less violent than your own? What in their societies made them violent or peaceful? Do any of these causes still exist in your own society? What, if anything, do these examples suggest about the control of violence in your own society? What, if anything, do they suggest to us about making our societies more peaceful?

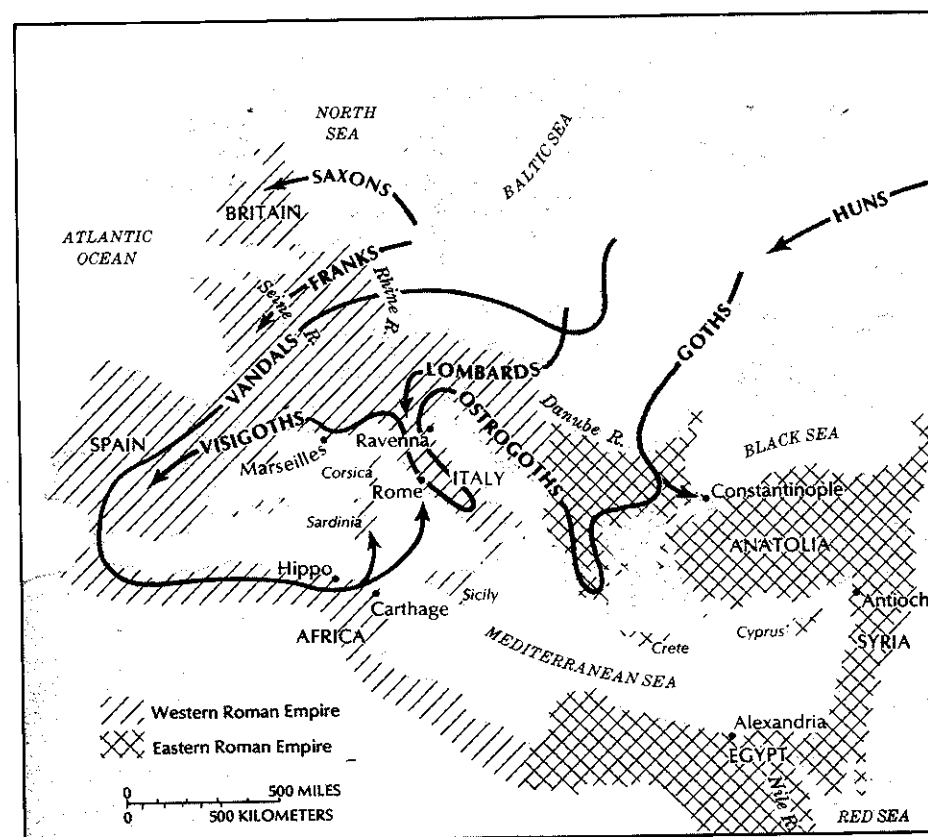
CHILDREN OF ATILA: THE BARBARIANS

Many Europeans and Americans are descended in part from the barbarian tribes that swept over the Roman Empire from the steppes of Asia around A.D. 500. These ancestors were a pretty unruly bunch. The Roman gentleman Sidonius Apollinaris boasted that he would rather "have braved destitution, fire, sword and pestilence" than submitted to the Visigoths or Gauls. But when these tribes moved into Italy, he resigned himself to rub shoulders with their unkempt chieftains, whose hair smelled of rancid butter and whose mouths emitted odors of onion and garlic and strange Germanic sounds.

One of the best of these chiefs, according to their own storytellers, was "good king Guntramn," a leader of the Franks (who settled in what is now France). Guntramn could be as jovial and lustful as the next guy, but "when he was with his bishops he conducted himself like one of them." In fact he was made a saint by the early church. The only thing you might say against Guntramn is that he had a taste for murder. Among his many victims were two physicians who were unable to heal his wife.

The Lombard king Alboin, who brought the tribe from the Danube into Italy, killed the king of the Gepids and married his daughter. He might have created a unified Lombard state in northern Italy (in the sixth century) if he had been more sensitive. Paul the Deacon tells a story of Alboin's offering his wife some wine in a goblet that was made from her father's skull. It seems she didn't get the joke. Paul tells us that the "silly woman" had the old jokester assassinated.

It is possible that Guntramn and Alboin were not unusual. One seventh-century historian of the tribal invasions has a mother of a barbarian king advise her son: "If you want to accomplish something and make a name for yourself, destroy everything that others have built and massacre everyone that you have conquered; for you are not able to build better monuments than those constructed by your predecessors and there is no more noble accomplishment for you to make your name." Whether or not any mother's son ever heard those words, they certainly express a part of the barbarian consciousness. The leaders of nomadic tribes were particularly sensitive to the issue of proving their abilities in war: courage, strength,



THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS OF EUROPE, FOURTH TO SIXTH CENTURIES A.D.

Successive waves of barbarian nomads were pushed out of the Eurasian grasslands and northern Europe by the Huns. Some, like the Goths and Vandals, migrated throughout Europe: The Ostrogoths settled in Italy, the Visigoths in Spain, and the Vandals throughout the Mediterranean.

and even cruelty must have ranked high among tribal values. The fortunes of these tribes, especially in hard times, were often a direct product of their capacities for destroying and taking. And throughout their lives they were trained to hunt, to wield a sword, to carry out lightning invasions on horseback, and to bring booty and slaves back to camp.

The tribes that penetrated deepest into the Roman Empire were probably less fierce than those that were pushing them from the steppes. (The earliest invaders closest to Rome were actually often semicivilized tribes "retreating" across the Alps.) Even the barbarians told stories about the greater cruelty of other tribes further away from civilization. The Huns, according to Ammien Marcellin, were the least civilized and the most feared:

Their ferocity knew no bounds. They branded their own children's cheeks so that they grew old beardless. These stocky, thick-necked creatures cooked no food, but gorged themselves on wild roots and the raw flesh of the first animal they saw. They had no shelters, no burials, and only rat skin clothing that they wore until it disintegrated. It was said that they were nailed to their horses. They did not dismount to eat or drink. Often they stayed mounted to sleep and dream.¹

These tribal ancestors were certainly "barbarians." The word is appropriate. They were barbarians in the sense that the Greeks and Romans used the word: they spoke strange "bar bar"—like sounds. But, more significantly, they were barbarians in the two modern senses of the word: they were both violent and primitive (or, more precisely, at a preurban state of development). The brutality of their lives and their lack of the tools, knowledge, arts, or comforts of more advanced city societies are enough to warrant the description "barbarian."

We do not use the word "barbarian" in order to make moral judgments about these people. Some of the early Christians and Romans did. It was enough for some of the educated witnesses to the invasions to point out that the tribes were pagans or Germanic: that was just like saying that the invaders were morally inhuman. This attitude was particularly common in the Roman aristocracy and among the bishops of the church. But at least one monk in Marseilles around the year 440, who called himself Salvien, gives us a different view.

It is true, Salvien wrote in a book that has somehow survived, that the Saxon people are cruel, the Franks untrustworthy, and the Huns immodest. "But," he asks rhetorically, "are their vices any more sinful than our own? Is the lewdness of the Huns more criminal than ours? Is the treachery of the Franks to be blamed more than our own? Is the drunken German more reprehensible than a drunken Christian? Is a greedy barbarian worse than a greedy Christian? Is the deceit of a Hun or of a Gepid so extraordinary?"

The barbarians, Salvien reminds us, had no monopoly on brutality or sin. In fact, they were not much different from the Roman authorities that they displaced. Their invasion was successful because Roman society had become as violent and insecure as nomadic society. From the perspective of the poor in Roman society the barbarians were sometimes preferable masters:

The castaway Roman poor, the grieving widows, the orphans under foot, even many of the well-born and educated Romans took refuge among their enemies. They sought Roman humanity among the barbarians so that they would not perish from barbarian inhumanity among the Romans. They were different from the barbarians in their manners, their language, and the smell of their clothes, but these differences were preferable to injustice and cruelty. They went to live among the barbarians on all sides, and never regretted it. They preferred to live free under the appearance of slavery, than to be slaves under

the guise of liberty. Roman citizenship, once highly esteemed and bought at a high price, is today not only worthless, but despised. Those who did not flee were forced to become barbarians by the persecution of Roman law or the anarchy of Roman lawlessness. We call them rebels and lost men, but it is we who have forced them to become criminals.²

Salvien says a lot. Rome had become as violent as the barbarian world. The invasions were accompanied by the revolt of the Roman oppressed and dispossessed. The Roman Empire wasn't assassinated. It committed suicide. At least (since civilizations are not mortal), the owners of Rome allowed their possession to be mangled beyond repair.

Europe was born in this marriage of settled barbarian and barbarized Roman poor. The barbarian had learned that you get from life only what you take from others. The Roman poor had learned that there is no peace or security when a few wealthy families take everything from everyone else. Neither the barbarian nor the Roman knew anything of freedom or the peaceful life. The only world they were allowed to have was chaotic and violent—and even that had to be taken by force.

Life meant very little in early European society. Few writers were concerned with the hardships of the common people, but a few examples taken at random give us an idea of what it must have been like in the first few centuries after the barbarian migration.

One writer, Gregory of Tours, tells a story about the people of Orléans and Blois looting and burning the houses of Chateaudun and Chartres, massacring many of the people, and then receiving the same treatment from the survivors. Another, Gregory I, writes of the tyranny of the tax collectors forcing the inhabitants of Corsica to sell their children and seek refuge among the "unspeakable Lombards." Another, the Venerable Bede, describes how after three years of drought and famine one group of forty or fifty people "exhausted by hunger, went to a cliff top above the sea and flung themselves over, holding hands."

The neutral language of the law codes expresses the cheapness of life: "the fine for cutting off someone's hand, foot, eye, or nose is 100 sous; but only 63 if the hand is still hanging; for cutting off a thumb 50 sous, but only 30 if it is still hanging; for cutting off an index finger the fine is 35 sous; two fingers together is 35 sous; three fingers together is 50 sous."

Written law (like the excerpt from the Salic code above) had little meaning if you fell into the hands of the enemies. When Saint Leger, the bishop of Autun, was captured by an enemy palace mayor in 677, they cut out his tongue; then they forced him to walk barefoot in a pool of sharpened rocks that cut like spikes; then they pierced his eyes. The stories are endless. Another tells of some unfortunate soul being tortured for three days and then tied to the rear of a vicious horse who was whipped until it bolted. Others were killed by being "drawn and quartered": attached to two horses who ran in opposite directions. Cruelty was limitless.

THE BARBARIANS CIVILIZE THEMSELVES

One thing that is indisputable is that the chaos of the barbarian invasions gradually abated. By the sixth and seventh centuries, the number of invasions declined and most of the nomadic tribes had settled down to an agricultural life. The Goths who had terrorized Roman legions had produced a fairly elaborate culture by the sixth century. One of them, Jordanes, a historian, could boast that the Goths had a king who was a philosopher and scientist and that they had enough professors of philosophy to rival ancient Greece. He exaggerates, of course, but these are not exaggerations that would please a real barbarian.

By the eighth century the sudden terror of barbarian life had given way to the stable regularity of farming, collecting taxes, and making laws. The Franks had established a kingdom with relatively fixed boundaries and laws that was healthy enough to ward off an invading Muslim army from Spain. By 800 Charlemagne had himself crowned by the pope as "Emperor of the Romans," and this was not a completely foolish analogy: his empire included all of France and a good part of current Germany, Austria, and Italy (including Rome). Though he himself could not write, he gathered many of the leading European intellectuals (monks) to his court. One of them, Alcuin, could tell Charlemagne: "If your intentions are carried out, it may be that a new Athens will rise in Frankland."

A new series of invasions from the north (which we'll turn to soon) were to cut short the Carolingian summer of high culture and established law. But stability and prosperity had conditioned even the common peasant to demand "justice" where an ancestor may have needed "blood." The customs of the people were no longer those of barbarians.

Barbarian morality had been based on the need for vengeance. Tribal families were often ripped apart by feuds that continued indefinitely. When an affront was committed against one's family or tribe, honor required that it be avenged. It was impossible to sleep until the wrong had been righted with blood. Gradually, settled barbarian chiefs (and later, kings) were able to insist on a legal settlement of tribal disputes. Money or something of value became a symbolic substitute for blood vengeance. The excerpt from the Salic code (which we quoted disparagingly before) was actually a step toward a less-violent society. "An eye for an eye" satisfied the basest human passions for vengeance, but (as the Christian monks taught) the motives of an assailant were also important. What was the point of blinding another merely to even the score? One life could not be brought back by the loss of another, and (as the tribal elder, king, or administrator well knew) the score was never even: the feud or vendetta meant continual warfare and prevented the rise of an orderly state.

Thus, the vendetta was gradually replaced by a system of "blood prices" for various kinds of mutilation and murder. These fines depended on the extent of the damage and the "blood worth" of the victim. The result, as the Lombard king Rothbari explained at the end of his own list of fines, was that "for all of the

above-mentioned wounds we have provided a higher compensation than our forebears, so that when such compensation is paid, all hostility will cease."

The blood price should be judged a step beyond barbarism, since it made family feuds less frequent as they became more expensive. But even the notion of a blood price was barbaric from the perspective of the Christian church. It limited violence but withheld blame. As long as the price was paid, the matter was settled. The church welcomed the substitution of the blood price for the vendetta but still insisted that a moral issue was involved. Churchmen compiled books of God's punishments for acts of violence. These acts were seen as sins, not just temporary imbalances in the social order. Eventually, the Lombards and other tribes viewed the spilling of blood and taking of life as moral wrongs that should not be committed—even if compensation were possible. This more "moral" attitude toward violence was still not based on any modern humane faith in the sacredness of life. It was based only on the fear of God's punishment. Gradually, the barbarian indifference to death was replaced by a feeling of "shame" for committing antisocial acts. In turn, shame, which was produced only by social pressure, was eventually transformed into Christian feelings of personal guilt. The history of the human conscience has not yet been (and may never be) written, but it seems quite likely that as barbarians became settled, civilized, and Christian, they developed greater capacities for shame and then guilt. Even guilt became increasingly internalized. In medieval Europe guilt was little more than the verdict rendered by the Christian king or his judge. In modern society guilt is still the verdict of the jury, but it is much more: it is the massive internal regulator that responds to so much of what we do.

From indifference to shame to guilt, from vendetta to blood price to responsibility, as barbarian society became more settled, as the individual became more responsible for his or her behavior, as laws and procedure replaced the gut need for vengeance, European society became less violent.

The change has sometimes been agonizingly slow, however. The family feud was a way of life in Appalachian America only decades ago. The vendetta is still common in Italy, Eastern Europe, and other poor regions of the developed world. Banditry, secret societies (like the Mafia), and vigilantes are still more important than the law and the justices of the peace in some relatively "modern" areas. And besides these remnants of the old world in the new, the newest, most developed countries (like the United States) often display a considerable appetite for violence.

The remnants of old world barbarism are easier to understand. The Sicilian hom of the Mafia has not changed all that much in the last thousand years, neither has the climate of Latin American revolutions and Indian massacres, nor has the culture of social oppression and natural catastrophe in much of the developing world. These examples remind us that this sort of violence—even in the barbarian period—was the natural life of "hardship society."

Charlemagne's empire was never able to overcome hardship. Its thriving culture and law were only a hint of what was possible. That possibility was shattered by

a new series of invasions: Hungarian nomads from the steppes, Muslim cavalry from the south, and Viking pirates from the north.

ISLAM AND THE MUSLIMS

If you had to dream up a name for a people who were to conquer most of the territory of two major world empires in little more than a generation, you would probably not call them the "Surrenderers" or the "Submitters." But that is the meaning of the Arabic *slm*, which, with added vowels, becomes Islam (for the religion) and Muslim, or Moslem (for the followers). The apparent contradiction between their name and their activity can be resolved easily. They thought of themselves as those who submitted completely to the will of God, and they believed that God wanted them to spread his word to the ends of the earth.

God's word came in a book called the Koran (or, again with different vowels and emphasis, the Qur'an). According to tradition, the Koran was dictated in ringing classical Arabic to the illiterate prophet Muhammad in the mountains overlooking the trading town of Mecca in Saudi Arabia beginning around the year 610.

The religion of the people of Mecca at the time was mixed. There were some Jews, Christians, and Persian Zoroastrians, but most Meccans worshiped the natural spirits called *jinn* and some more important tribal gods, usually associated with a particular tree, grove, stone, or other natural spot. Many of the surrounding tribes came on pilgrimages (and accompanying merchant fairs) to shrines like the Ka'bah building in Mecca, where sacred objects were kept. The pilgrimages and trading fairs were held during four sacred truces each year. The Quraysh tribe and one of their more abstract gods, Allah the creator, presided over the truce.

At some point, Muhammad found the monotheistic religions more appealing than the tribal deities and practices of his birth. Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity were highly moralistic faiths. They enrolled their adherents in personal struggles on behalf of Ahura Mazda the force of light, Yahweh the God of Abraham, and the God of Christ, respectively.

As we shall see, it is not always clear whether the moralistic religions end up killing fewer people than other religions. The morality of tribal religions might seem limited. There is much bargaining with the gods for favors. The morality enshrined in Bedouin life centered on "individual and group pride and point of honour—pride in birth, pride in one's wealth or prowess, pride which led, when crossed to an unremitting, pitiless vengefulness; to a passionate and heedless (if sometimes magnificent) pursuit of self-centered, inherently trivial ends."³ While the tribal religions of the Arabian Peninsula made practical accommodations with their enemies in order to carry on trade, Irano-Semitic monotheism sought to create

justice. The victory of justice in history required the activity of God's community of the faithful. It was an imposing responsibility.

Not all monotheistic moralisms sought the same kind of justice. The moralism of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster reflected the power of the landed Persian aristocracy: its sense of justice had much to do with obedience and order. The Abrahamic moralism of Judaism and Christianity reflected more of the experience of the merchants' class than that of the landed aristocracy. Its sense of justice had less to do with obedience and more to do with human interaction, honesty, fairness, and equality.

Muhammad's justice was based on the merchant's equality before God, and the market. But it retained some important elements of Zoroastrianism: the eternal struggle between good and evil, lightness and darkness, and the expectation of the imminent end of the world.

When the sun shall be darkened, when the stars shall be thrown down, when the mountains shall be set moving, when the pregnant camels shall be untended, when the savage beasts shall be stampeded, when the seas shall be set boiling, when the souls shall be coupled, when the buried infant shall be asked for what sin she was killed, when the scrolls shall be unrolled, when the skies shall be stripped off, when Hell shall be set blazing, when Paradise shall be brought near—a soul shall know what it has produced.

Passages like this from the Koran (81: 1–14) do not so much introduce new moral ideas (except, here, that female infanticide was wrong). The very word for moral behavior in the Koran was "the known." What the Koran demanded was a moral commitment. It commanded the faithful to do what was right, without hovering halfway, before God the creator.

Muhammad's calling to speak for one transcendent God and one righteous community did not please all the gods of Mecca. For the ruling Quraysh tribe, the pilgrimages constituted a profitable magnet of tourism and business. When Muhammad denounced what he called their idol worship, he was run out of town. In the middle of the night, he escaped with a few trusted supporters to the town of Medina, an oasis further up the mountain chain that stretched along the Red Sea.

That escape in A.D. 622 (since called the *hegira*, or journey) marks the year 1 of the Muslim calendar because in Medina, Muhammad was able to create the righteous community. What, we might ask, did he do?

He elaborated a set of rules that, much like those of Christian Europe, prohibited some of the most violent behavior of tribal society. Arbitration replaced blood feud. Infanticide (as we have seen) was condemned. Provision was made for the care of orphans, widows, and the poor. Drinking, gambling, and the charging of

interest on loans were prohibited. Nevertheless, the rugged warrior caste of desert nomadic society was not eliminated. In fact, in some ways it was encouraged.

An early event sets the problem clearly. Raiding was a common activity among the tribes of Arabia. It was the way small tribes got larger. Muhammad condoned raids by his followers, especially if the raids might humiliate the Quraysh. The first successful raid occurred at Nakhlah, near Mecca. A small group attacked a caravan of the Quraysh during truce month and brought home the booty. One man was killed. It is not clear if Muhammad sanctioned the raid during truce month, but he allowed the booty to be accepted. The people of Medina were outraged until they read in the Koran that while violation of the truce was wrong, it was justified by the persecution of the faith.

Here we see, on a limited scale, the conflict between the practical morality of tribal religion and the demands of monotheism. The truce was a symbol of the success of Meccan tribal religion, but it was accepted by Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians as well. It was not a superstitious custom, and neither Muhammad nor his followers had ever questioned it. Thus, the raid at Nakhlah was an outright betrayal, which created an irreparable breach between the holy community (the *Ummah*) of Islam and the customs of the surrounding Arab and Berber tribes. But for Muhammad to accept the truce would have been to accept the moral jurisdiction of the entire community, including the Quraysh and other tribes. Instead he chose to seize the opportunity to declare the moral independence of Islam.

Muhammad also found it necessary at an early stage in Medina to differentiate his community from that of other monotheists. Medina was chosen for the first community because there were a large number of Jews, who were presumed to be sympathetic. Many of Muhammad's early converts were Jews and Christians. Muhammad was seen as the last of a line of biblical prophets that included Abraham, Moses, and even Jesus. Initially, the Muslims of Medina prostrated themselves five times a day facing Jerusalem. Muhammad expected the Jews of Medina to be won over. But they were not. They could not accept Muhammad's abstract universalism or his different accounts of biblical stories. As a result, Muhammad decided to expell the Banu Qaynuqa tribe of Jews from Medina. He made fewer attempts to convert other monotheists. He reinterpreted his relationship to Judaism. His monotheism stemmed directly from Abraham, rather than the later Moses, he said. Similarly, he replaced Jerusalem with Mecca as the point of orientation for daily prayers. Muhammad also turned his attention to the religious needs of the Bedouin and Arab tribes. The Ka'bah at Mecca, formerly the object of tribal pilgrimage, now became identified with Abraham and the destination of a yearly Muslim pilgrimage, the *hajj*. As Islam took on its own identity, the Islamic community offered its own rituals. The month of Ramadan, when Muhammad was said to have received the Koran, was set aside for fasting and prayer during daylight hours. An "alms" or charity tax for the poor was instituted. A new attitude toward war and force developed.

THE JIHAD AND THE GROWTH OF ISLAM

War had been endemic among the Bedouin tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. Muhammad was able to suppress it and turn it outward to win conquests for the faith. After 629, when he entered Mecca unopposed, he was able to draw from the leadership of the Meccan tribes as well as those of Medina to lead his armies. In 630 he led an army against Byzantine colonies in the northern half of the peninsula and supported attacks on the Persian Empire in the east. By the time of his death in 632, his troops had conquered almost the entire peninsula. "Fight in the cause of God against those who fight against you," the Koran commanded. Those who die in the cause of a *jihad*, a holy war, are not really dead.

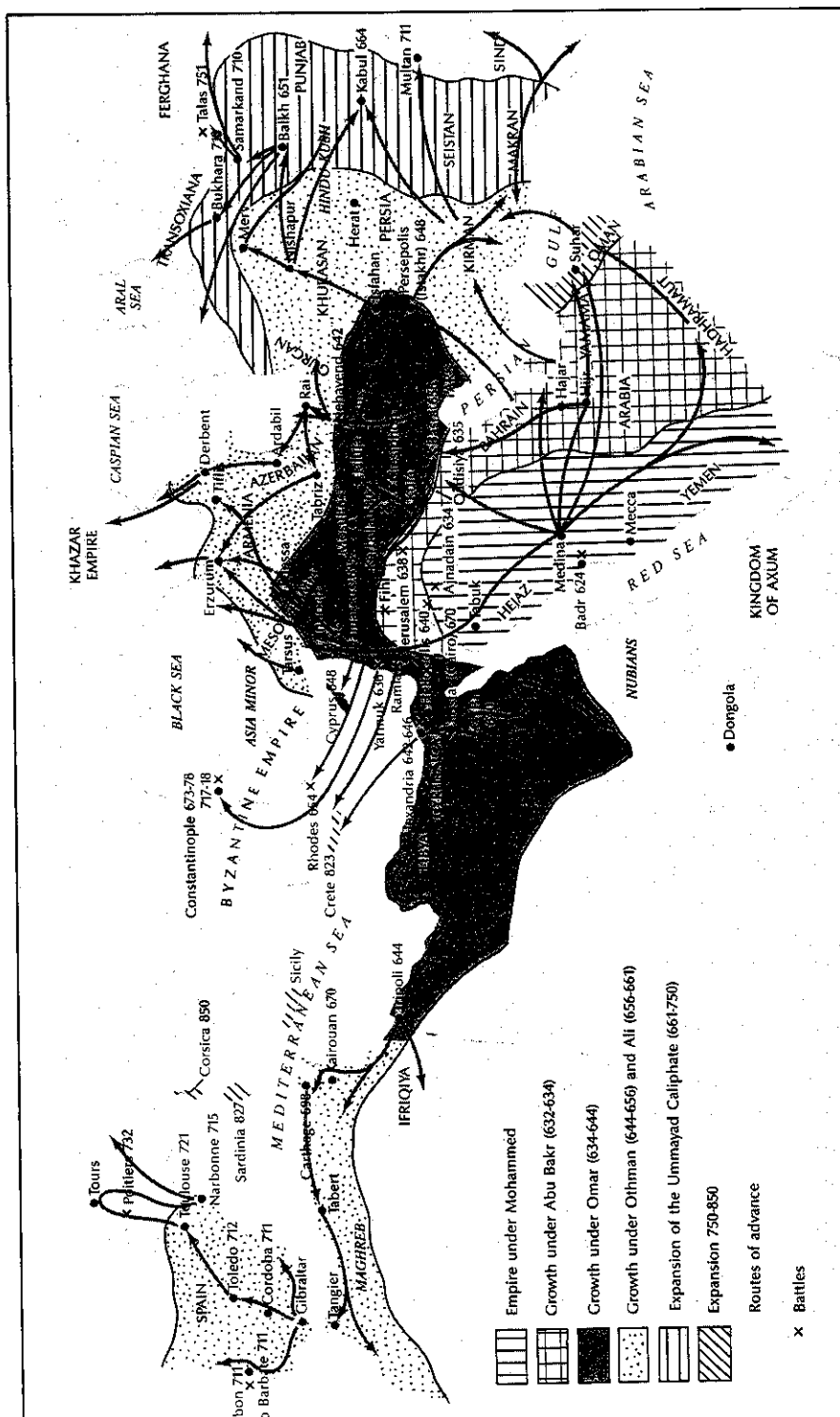
Indeed, they are living in the presence of their Lord and are provided for. They are jubilant over that which God has bestowed upon them of His bounty, and because on them shall come no fear, nor shall they grieve.

(3:169)

The dramatic explosion of Arab armies out of the Arabian Peninsula in the years after the death of Muhammad in 632 is astonishing. Abu Bakr (r. 632-634) consolidated and extended control of the peninsula. His successor, Omar (r. 634-644), conquered Damascus in 635, Jerusalem, Syria, and Palestine by 638, and the Persian Empire as far as India in the east and the Byzantine territory of Egypt and North Africa by the time of his death.

SUCCESSION, SECTARIANISM, AND THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS

If tribal conflict could be channeled into the *jihad*, conflict did not disappear entirely. The very stature of Muhammad as the Prophet of Islam, and the important role he played in the governance of the Islamic community, left the question of succession unresolved. Abu Bakr, the first successor ("caliph"), was elected because he was one of Muhammad's earliest followers. Omar, too, was elected, but when he was killed in 644 the electors were divided between two members of Muhammad's clan. The vote went to Othman, who had married two of the Prophet's daughters, rather than Ali, Muhammad's cousin, who had also married a daughter. When Othman proved unpopular he was murdered. This led to a civil war (656-661) between the party of Ali (who was recognized by some as the successor) and that of Othman's relative Muawiya. Arbitrators were called to decide who should be caliph. Some of the fundamentalists among the arbitrators withdrew (and were therefore called Kharijites, or Seceders) because they believed that arbitration



was a compromise. Ali had them massacred for their refusal to arbitrate. Finally, in 661, Ali was killed by a Kharijite, and Muawiya became caliph. Muawiya inaugurated the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), thus institutionalizing the succession. But the conflict over legitimacy did not end. Those who had supported Ali continued to support his descendants. These partisans of Ali (Shi'at Ali, or Shi'a, or Shi'ites) supported Ali's son Husayn (Muhammad's grandson) in a revolt against Muawiya that was brutally defeated by the Umayyad army. The murders of Ali and Husayn became central events in the formation of Shi'a sectarianism. It appeared to them that Ali's blood tie to his cousin Muhammad combined with his marriage to the Prophet's daughter made Ali the designated successor. From this Shi'a perspective, the martyrdoms of Ali and Husayn proved that every true *imam* (religious leader) was destined to be excluded by corrupt governments until a *mahdi* (especially inspired *imam*) would appear and bring about the final struggle, victory, and last judgment. The imagery of bloodshed, the faith in violence, and the call to martyrdom in this Shi'a tradition made it generally uncomfortable to established governments. It was more frequently a voice of protest than an official orthodoxy. Some of the more militant Shi'ites (like the Ishmailis, who believed that a sixth-generation *imam* in Muhammad's family named Ishmail was the *mahdi*) formed secret brotherhoods that condoned terrorist attacks against corrupt rulers. "Brothers," one Ishmaili poet wrote, "when the time of triumph comes, with good fortune from both worlds as our companion, then by one single warrior on foot a king may be stricken with terror, though he own more than a hundred thousand horsemen."⁴ One group of Ishmaili Shi'ites in Iran and Syria trained their devotees to kill enemy rulers with daggers on what were virtually suicide missions. Their name, the Assassins, has come to stand for all political and public murder.

Most Iranians were members of a more moderate Shi'a sect called the Twelvers (because they accepted a twelfth-generation *imam* as *mahdi*). But all Shi'a sects were particularly strong in Iran, possibly because of the importance of righteous struggle in the Older Persian Zoroastrian tradition. Iran became a Shi'a state after 1500 and again after 1979.

Other Muslim sectarians waged militant campaigns against worldly governments, infidels, and backsliders. Some, like the Kharijites who were descendants of the Seceders of the first civil war, refused to cooperate with any governments or accept any secular or religious leaders. They also took an uncompromising position

THE EXPANSION OF ISLAM, A.D. 632-936

The spread of Islam beyond the Arabian peninsula began almost immediately after the Prophet's death in 632. By 711 Arab armies were about to extend the faith to northeastern India and Spain at the same time. By 750 when the Abbasids ousted the Umayyad Caliphate, Islam was the major civilization west of China.

on who could be a Muslim, eliminating from the *Ummah* anyone who had ever committed a major sin.

SUNNI CENTRISM

Most Muslims were not Shi'ites or sectarian purists. The Muslim mainstream is called Sunni because it accepts the Sunna, or tradition established by the Prophet, the Koran, and the history of the Muslim community. Sunnis tend to include everyone in the *Ummah* instead of separating themselves from others. For them, the *Ummah* is not an invisible brotherhood but a visible theocratic state under the guidance of the Koran and the consensus of the Muslim community. The Sunnis accept the caliphs, good and bad, but as rulers who protect the Muslim state, not as authorities in matters of faith. For the Sunnis, everyone who declares that "there is no god, but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger" should be accepted as a Muslim because "only God knows what is in the heart."

Mainstream, or Sunni, Islam was no more violent than Christianity or Persian Zoroastrianism; in fact, it was probably less so. Muslim conquest was greeted in some parts of the Byzantine and Persian empires as liberation. After an initial disastrous occupation of the Persian capital, Muslim soldiers and officials lived openly and mixed freely in garrison towns. Koran reciters were sent as advance missionaries with the troops. Mosques were built along with military garrisons in every conquered town of any consequence. There all Muslims came as brothers to perform public worship, especially Friday midday, each individual reciting the Koran. Tribal tensions and social distinctions did not disappear in the administration of the Umayyad caliphate. Arabs were chosen as governors of provinces over local ethnic leaders. Sometimes, in fact, Arab Christians were included among the most trusted. Muawiya's Syrian Arab army at the capital in Damascus included Syrian Christians as well as Muslims. One of the greatest poets at the court in Damascus was al-Akhtal (640-710), a Christian Arab.

Non-Muslims were sometimes plundered when conquered and always taxed when governed. In general, however, non-Muslims were left alone to abide by their own laws and customs, as long as these laws and customs did not conflict with Muslim law or the administrative needs of a Muslim governor. Many subjects converted to Islam and, except for some Arabs, were treated equally with other Muslims. Christians and Jews were respected as comonotheists and "people of the Book," the Bible.

Perhaps all monotheistic societies were likely to persecute the faithless, but the political enforcement of religious doctrine varied. The Muslim state, unlike the Christian or Persian, was a theocracy: political and religious authority were united; the state was the fulfillment of God's plan for a just society. But despite this, or possibly because of it, Muslim caliphs and political governors left religious matters to the people. The religious persecution of pagans, nonbelievers, and heretics might

have been greater in Christendom than in the *Dar al-Islam* (lands under Muslim rule).

NOMADS AND KNIGHTS: TWO WAYS OF WARFARE

The classical civilizations that had prospered in the cities of the great seas and river valleys of Eurasia—in China, India, Persia, and the Mediterranean region—were invaded from north and south. From the south came the Arabs. From the north came Huns, Goths, Turks, Vikings, and Mongols. Between A.D. 200 and 1200 barely a century passed without the appearance of a new threat from the horsemen of the Eurasian grasslands or the southern deserts.

There were important differences between the first invasions of the Goths and Huns beginning in the third century and that of the Arabs of the seventh century. The Arabs who led the Muslim invasions were partially urbanized. In some cases they were products of sophisticated market towns and cities. But many of the converts who made up the armies of invading Muslim horsemen were drawn from the Arab, Bedouin, and Berber nomads of Arabia and North Africa. In that respect they were similar to the nomadic horsemen of the great Eurasian steppe. To the farmers and city people of China, Persia, Byzantium, and western Rome, invaders were invaders. Rapidly moving horsemen, with swords or bows and arrows, were a fearsome sight.

The effect of these invasions was similar from the Mediterranean to the East China Sea. As we have already seen, the invasions aided the process of political decay and decentralization. Empires were broken up into more defensible private domains, run by powerful nobles or clans. Cities were less safe. Castles were built and life closed in behind the walls. There is one notable exception to this: Constantinople, which remained a vital city throughout. But in China, India, Persia, Western Rome, and much of the Byzantine Empire outside of Constantinople, city life diminished, and political power became less centralized and more feudal. In some cases the invaders established a new political order. The Arabs are the best examples of this. But the response of the old civilizations to the invasions is also significant because it affects us even today. They developed the armored knight that is still such an important part of our folklore.

In most cases knighthood was a product of a manorial economy, in which serfs or tenant farmers provided the lord of the manor with part of their produce, labor, and military service in return for his protection. It was also usually the product of a feudal society, in which personal pledges of protection between lords and their subordinate vassals replaced the official trappings of the state: office, law, administration, and professional or citizen armies. In short, these were usually societies dominated by large agricultural estates rather than central governments. Even in the case of strong centralized states, however, the armored cavalry was the best answer to the invading horsemen. Thus in the Chinese Sui (589-618) and Tang

(618–907) dynasties, feudalism ended and the empire was reunited, but manorialism remained the dominant economic institution, and the armored cavalry the best defense. Similarly in Byzantium, since it fended off tendencies toward feudalism, the state ensured that the large estates would produce the horses necessary for the military corps of armored warriors.

Thus, there were two types of military societies that emerged across Eurasia in the first millennium A.D., one based on the nomadic horsemen and the other on the armored knights. One encouraged speed, individual agility, and the success of the lightning strike. The other required vast organization and elaborate rules, and was more useful as a defense. The one could attack at will. The other could hold.

STATE LANDS AND ARMIES: CHINA AND BYZANTIUM

In the case of China and Byzantium, where state formation was relatively well advanced by the seventh century, the heavily armed cavalries were based on the cultivation of government land rather than on feudal lords. In China, the founder of the Sui dynasty, Emperor Wen-di [Wen-ti] (589–605), instituted a formal combination of farming and fighting that had first been suggested as “state colonies” by Cao Cao around 196 and had actually been furthered by the Toba barbarians who ruled northern China as the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534). In 590 Wen-di settled soldiers as small farmers on state-owned land, some of which was new land opened up near the frontiers and some of which had been confiscated from the aristocracy. This “equitable fields system” undermined the separate authority of large landowners and supplied an independent class of farmer-soldiers at one stroke. Military leaders were selected for special training by a “divisional militia” system, also inaugurated by Wen-di. One strong young man was selected from every six families of middle rank and higher. He was exempted from taxation in return for extensive military training and service, supported partially by the state and partially by the other five families. While this system did not survive intact into the Tang dynasty, the practice of providing tax exemption for military service did. Further, the equitable fields system was retained by the Tang. These military farming lands offered economic independence in return for continued military training. “For three out of four seasons they worked at farming and plowing,” a ninth century writer observed. “For one season they perfected themselves in the military skills of riding, swordsmanship, and archery.”⁵

A similar state-supported system developed in Byzantium. It was called the “theme system” because it substituted military districts, or “themes,” for the “provinces” that had been established by Diocletian. Themes were permanent military organizations of society, in which military officials governed instead of landed aristocrats. Each theme was responsible for providing imperial troops. Those who served were, as in China, small landholders who were farmer-soldiers, excused

from taxation in return for military service. The themes probably originated in the Byzantine conquest of Persian territories under the emperor Heraclius (610–641) and increased in importance with the crisis of the Muslim invasions. The themes served the same purpose as the divisional militias in China. They gave the emperor control over the provincial nobility, who, in both civilizations, deprived the state of soldiers and taxpayers at the same time. But while the Chinese state became increasingly dominant after the Sui, the Byzantine state was weakened. The theme structure of the Byzantine Empire was discontinued by Alexius I after 1081. New invasions (by Seljuk Turks), central government weakness, and the revival of provincial nobles caused its demise. An ominously feudal institution called *pronoia* gave rural magnates large grants of land in return for military service. These grants often included immunity from taxation and the right to administer justice. Eventually they included exemption from military service as well.

Byzantium survived until 1453 because Constantinople survived, and Constantinople survived because of the Byzantine navy more than the army. For most of its history the Byzantine navy controlled access to its shores. On the occasion when the port of Constantinople was blockaded by the Muslims (674–678), a recently invented weapon called “Greek fire,” a chemical mixture that ignited even on contact with water, proved decisive. The impact of such a weapon on the Rus (Russians) in 941 is recounted in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*:

Theophanes [the Byzantine commander] pursued them in boats with Greek fire, and dropped it through pipes upon the Russian ships, so that a strange miracle was offered to view. Upon seeing the flames, the Rus cast themselves into the sea water, being anxious to escape. . . .⁶

“Some,” according to the Byzantine account, “weighted down by their breastplates and helmets sank to the bottom of the sea. . . . Others were burned as they swam on the waves.”⁷

If Greek fire was the Byzantine “lightning from heaven” (as the Russians called it), their heavily armored cavalry was their secret weapon on earth. The heavily armored cavalry of Byzantium depended on a couple of military innovations that originated in the Persian Parthian Empire of the second century and were continued by the Persian Sassanid Empire after 226. These were big horses and stirrups. Larger horses than the ponies of the steppe nomads were necessary to carry men in heavy armor. The breeding and raising of such horses required rich grasslands and considerable wealth, probably more of both than most nomadic tribes commanded. The stirrup gave the horseman greater control over his mount and cushioned the blow of a heavy lance. Arrows could be shot with a bow at full gallop by well-trained horsemen who needed not fear falling off the horse. Lances required stirrups.

Most peasants in Byzantium (as elsewhere) fought in the infantry, but the heavy cavalry was the elite force of the imperial army. In Byzantium and China the heavy



"Greek fire" gave the Byzantine navy an effective weapon against Muslims and Russians after 675. (The Bettmann Archive)

cavalry was rigorously trained to respond in unison to horn, drum, and flag signals. The Byzantine "cataphracts" (as the armed cavalry was called) formed a wedge shape that gave the shock force of a battering ram in a cavalry charge. Their attack on the vaunted Russian axe-wielding infantry in 971, according to a Byzantine historian, suggests their value:

In the earlier clashes, neither side prevailed. The Russians felt it to be unendurable that they, who held among their neighbors a record of unbroken victory, should now lose it shamefully to the Byzantines, and they fought with desperate courage. But the Byzantines, for their part, thought it a foul disgrace if, hitherto successful against all opposition, they should now be worsted in a struggle against a foot-soldiering nation who couldn't even ride. . . . The evening star was already sinking when the Emperor John launched his final cavalry-charge on the Russians with devastating effect: "You are Romans!" he cried; "Now show your valor in your deeds!" Thus heartened, the cavalry burst out with irresistible ardor. The bugles sounded the charge. The Byzantine battle-cry rang out. The Russians wavered and fled. Their losses were enormous.⁸

EUROPEAN KNIGHTHOOD AND FEUDALISM

The first sign of an armored cavalry in Western Europe came in response to the invasion of the Muslims in the eighth century. In order to defeat the invading Muslim horsemen, the Franks borrowed the Byzantine model of heavily armored warriors on large horses and the stirrup. The Franks disdained use of the bow and

arrow, which was more popular in Byzantium and the main weapon of the Chinese.

Charlemagne (768–814) united the Germanic tribes of central Europe in a series of military campaigns of foot soldiers and cavalry that he conducted almost every year that he was king of the Franks. He extended his realm as far north as Scandinavia, as far east as the Avars in Hungary, as far south as the Lombard kingdom of Italy, and as far west as to push the Muslim across the Pyrenees into Spain. These conquests encouraged him to challenge Constantinople by having the pope crown him "Emperor of the Romans" on Christmas Day in the year 800.

Charlemagne's empire did not last much beyond his own lifetime. The threat of foreign invasion lessened, but imperial political power disintegrated. Knights, who were used to plunder, rape, and domination in an ever-expanding empire, turned inward to exploit the peasants.

Now they no longer joined forces with the king in one great army; instead, they sallied forth from a thousand lairs, from those castles dotting the countryside that had been built to ward off the invading foe. At first they did battle against the enemy, defending the homeland. But when in the tenth century the intervals between the waves of invasion grew longer, instead of laying down their arms they continued their rapine. Only the prey was different. What they still took now and then from the pagans they began to demand now from the "plebs," from the "unarmed people." After the year 1000, in the Frankish kingdom, the populace became the sole object of their pillaging, which went on with still greater impunity than before in view of the king's inability henceforth to check their violence and rapacity.⁹

In response to the rise of internal violence and oppression in the Frankish dominions, there arose a "peace movement, which grew inexorably around the year 1000."¹⁰ A society increasingly distinguished not between lords and commoners, but between knights and farmers, sword bearers and unarmed men, called for a code governing the use of weapons. The church enjoined the poor to take cover under its cloak. Churchmen insisted that "all who are horsemen and bear secular arms" take an oath. The oath proposed by the Frankish bishops in 1024 was the same oath to respect order and refrain from violence against the poor that Charlemagne had required of all his subjects. Now it was demanded only of the horsemen. The rest of society had become so poor and oppressed that "it would have been inconceivable for such a people to have continued to pledge their faith by sworn oath,"¹¹ according to the historian Georges Duby.

By the middle of the eleventh century in Europe, three "orders" of society had distinguished themselves: those who fought, those who worked, and those who prayed. Knights, peasants, and clergy led three different lives. The knights, however, were clearly becoming the dominant power in the society. They adopted the church's oath, with its religious sanction, to their own affairs, instituting an elaborate process of sanctifying knights, and swearing mutual loyalties. As knight-

hood became endowed with religious sanction, the clergy looked to redirect its activities to holier goals than the rape and plunder of Christians.

Rekindling the memory of Charlemagne, the Church dreamed of the halcyon days when pillage afflicted not peasants but pagans; it envisaged turning armed marauders into heroes of the righteous cause, soldiers of evil into knights of Christ.¹²

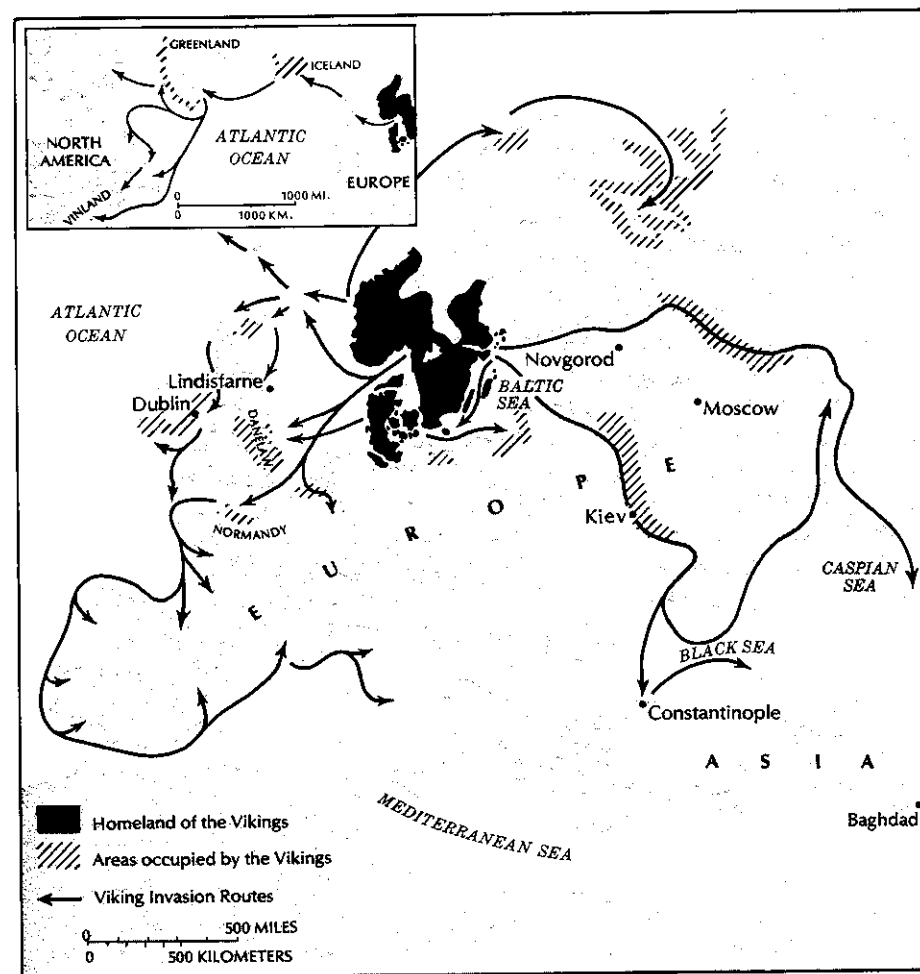
But before Europeans could organize a holy crusade against the Muslims, they had to meet an internal threat from the north.

TRADING AND RAIDING: THE VIKINGS

The Vikings are one of the most colorful "warrior societies" of European history. Between the eighth and eleventh centuries Viking ships and soldiers terrorized village settlements from Ireland to Russia, fought and traded in the cities of the Byzantine and Muslim empires, and established European outposts across the Atlantic Ocean. Not too much was known about the origins of these Norse when they first struck out from Scandinavia to conquer the English island of Lindisfarne in 793. Their ancestors may have been the "German" tribe that the Roman historian Tacitus called the Suiones in the first century. Tacitus remarks that the Suiones "are strong not only in arms and men but also in their fleets," that their curious ships have "a prow at both ends" but no sail, and that they can be found with their slaves along the ocean and rivers in search of wealth. Apparently, the Suiones were more settled than the nomadic tribes that Tacitus described. We hear no mention of them after Tacitus until the sixth century, when the Gothic historian Jordanes reports that the inhabitants of Scandinavia are unusually ferocious and tall. It was not until the end of the eighth century that the European tribes and descendants of the Romans had firsthand experience with the Norse. By that time the Scandinavians had improved their ships, added sails, and realized the potential plunder to be gained from a more settled Europe.

"Out of the north an evil shall break forth." The warning of the prophet Jeremiah must have rung in the ears of the Christian monks at Lindisfarne when the Norse sailed into history in 793. The English scholar Alcuin, who was staying in France at the court of Charlemagne, expressed the shock of European Christians at the sudden "pagan" attack. "Never before had such a terror appeared in Britain," he wrote, as the invasion of Lindisfarne by the Vikings. The Church of St. Cuthbert was robbed of its treasures and "spattered with the blood of the priests of God."

In a matter of decades the Vikings had conquered much of England, Scotland, and Ireland. They came usually as pirates. They murdered unarmed monks, looted sanctuaries, plundered the libraries that had preserved the literary heritage of the ancient world, and burned what they could not carry away. The booty they sought



THE EXPANSION OF THE VIKINGS, EIGHTH TO ELEVENTH CENTURIES A.D.

The Vikings (or Norse) spread eastward from Sweden to Russia and Constantinople, and westward from Norway to North America and the Mediterranean.

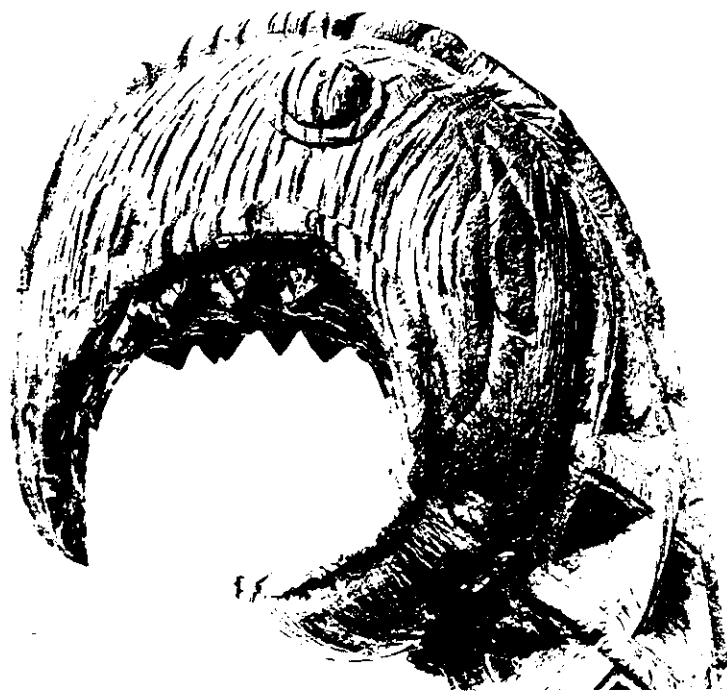
was more precious than the literary achievements of Charlemagne's civilization. They took gold and jewels, valuable objects that they might trade, and they raped and enslaved the wives and daughters of their victims. Sailing first from Norway, and then from Denmark and Sweden, these pirates terrorized the inhabitants of the British Isles especially throughout the ninth century.

In time, the terror of the Norse became modified or institutionalized. In 865 the English began paying a yearly ransom to their Scandinavian overlords, which was kind of a "protection" payment called the *Danegeld* (money for the Danes). Much

of central England was placed under the Danish king and administered as the *Danelaw*. Scandinavians established their own villages (like Dublin) in occupied territory or set up colonies in existing towns. These settlements were sometimes fortified encampments used for further pirate expeditions, but gradually became more like administrative and trading centers.

Perhaps there has always been a hazy line between raiding and trading, or maybe the sons of raiders are the ones who can afford to trade. Whatever the case, there is evidence for both continual piracy mixed with trading in Viking history and a gradually increasing emphasis on trade instead of raids. Piracy certainly continued throughout the Viking age, but the raids of the tenth and eleventh centuries up the rivers of France, along the coast of Spain, and into the Mediterranean Sea often became trading missions. This was especially true when the Vikings established fairly permanent colonies, as in Normandy in northern France and on the island of Sicily in the Mediterranean. It's safer to pillage distant ports than to plunder a neighbor.

Viking expansion was not all piracy and business, even in Western Europe, as the examples of colonization indicate. But colonization was usually a secondary



Head of a Viking ship, probably eighth century. (Granger)

activity in populated Western Europe. It was the major type of Scandinavian expansion in the east along the long rivers of Russia and in the west beyond the edge of the world.

Russia is, of course, the land of the Rus. The Rus were the Swedish colonists who began settling on the river trade routes between Scandinavia and the Byzantine capital at Constantinople in the ninth century. There the Swedes met some of the older inhabitants, Slavs (whose name reminds us that the Vikings took them as slaves) and Asians. The meetings must have often been violent, but eventually the Swedish towns at Novgorod and Kiev lost their Viking flavor and became the trading centers of the emerging Russian state. From these towns the Rus learned of the magnificence of the Byzantine Empire. The Rus were too weak to pose a serious threat to Constantinople, but Viking courage and military ability were famous enough for the Byzantine emperors to recruit these Rus for a special palace guard and as mercenaries in the Byzantine army. Meanwhile the Rus traded northern furs, honey, amber, wax, and captured slaves in exchange for the fine textiles, spices, wines, and luxuries of the Byzantine Empire at Constantinople and the Muslim Empire at Baghdad. According to a Muslim visitor, the Rus merchant would pray: "O Lord, I have come from distant parts with so many girls, so many sable furs. . . . Please send me a merchant who has many *dinars* and *dirhems*, and who will trade favorably with me without too much bartering."

While the Swedish Vikings turned piracy into colonization, and colonization into commercial activity in the vast eastern lands that were to be known as Russia, the Vikings of Norway explored the Atlantic Ocean. Since Viking society condoned piracy, its criminals and outcasts were not admitted to such a "respectable" calling. They were forced instead, like Erik the Red, to explore and settle in relatively unpopulated areas. Erik the Red had to leave Norway in a hurry "because of some killings" in the late 970s. He went to Iceland, which Vikings had taken from Irish priests about a hundred years before. He got into trouble there also, and was outlawed around 980. With another Iclander he set sail westward, arriving finally at a bleak mountainous land that he called Greenland. He ran into more trouble on his return to Iceland, so he was forced to make Greenland his permanent home. Soon a colonial settlement had been established on Erik's farm, a haven, probably, for the outcasts of "polite" Viking society.

Bjarni Herjolfsson discovered America about 985. Of course, Asians had arrived there by way of the Bering Sea over a thousand years before. It is also quite possible that the Irish priests who settled Iceland also "discovered" America before Bjarni. In any case, it was an accident (though less accidental than Columbus's later voyage). After a visit to Norway, Bjarni returned to his home in Iceland to find that his parents had left for Erik the Red's colony in Greenland. Bjarni set out to follow them. After a longer trip than expected, Bjarni and his crew finally saw land, but it lacked the mountains of Greenland.

Realizing they had gone too far, Bjarni and his crew did not land but sailed back until they found Greenland and Erik's colony. When they told the colonists

of their discovery, Erik's sons Leif and Thorvald gathered a crew to explore the new land. They named part of it *Helluland*, and part of it they called *Vinland*, presumably because of its vine foliage. It is also reported that Thorvald lived there for two years until he was killed by the local inhabitants. The only certain Viking site that has been unearthed so far is at the northern tip of Newfoundland, but it is quite likely that further archeological exploration will yield other sites.

The important thing, of course, is that the colony did not last. That fact tells more about Viking society than the fact of discovery. Viking society was capable of vast oceanic explorations, but it possessed neither the will nor the capability to maintain all of these far-flung colonies for long. The Vikings did not even remain in Greenland. They stayed in Iceland because its climate and vegetation and animal life were much more inviting, and also because it was within relatively easy supply distance of Norway. They remained in Russia because their settlements were prosperous trading centers close to the junction of three thriving cultures: the Byzantine, the Muslim, and the European Christian. Perhaps Viking culture was always more attuned to raiding and trading than to isolated, peaceful settlement.

The causes of Viking failure, as well as success, lie in the character of its militaristic culture. It was a culture in which aggressiveness was channeled into long-distance trade and profit seeking or war. Its long-term success was in the revival of trade and the development of both feudal and capitalistic institutions in Europe. The warrior element in Viking society that was not "civilized" into economic aggression was defeated in battle. The usual closing date is 1066, since that was the year that Harald the Hard Ruler, king of Norway, was killed by the English. The death of King Harald is a fitting symbolic end to Viking ascendancy. He represented Viking expansiveness at its zenith. As a boy he had fled from Norway to Kiev. To win back his father's Norwegian crown he prepared himself as a member, and then as the commander, of the Byzantine emperor's palace guard. He fought for the Greeks in Asia Minor, the Caucasus Mountains, and Jerusalem. He returned to Kiev as a seasoned victor, married a Russian princess, and lived to rule Norway, explore the Atlantic, and reconquer England. This "Thunderbolt of the North," the ultimate Viking ruler, was defeated, almost by chance, by Earl Harold Godwinson on September 25, 1066. The Vikings lost England, and gradually thereafter much more of their overseas empire.

The death of a universal Viking king like Harald was the proper symbol for the end of the Viking age. Except for the fortuitousness of his actual defeat, the event had all of the drama of final tragedy—almost the final Twilight of the Gods imagined in Viking legend. But despite the hopes of heroic culture, the death of a single individual never means the end of an age. Actually, Godwinson was killed a few days later by William of Normandy, a descendant of the Vikings who had conquered northern France. In a sense, 1066 marks the final victory, rather than defeat, of Viking culture. At the same time, Scandinavia became disorganized, European armies became better able to cope with pirate raids, and within a couple

of hundred years new military techniques and gunpowder made Viking military tactics obsolete.

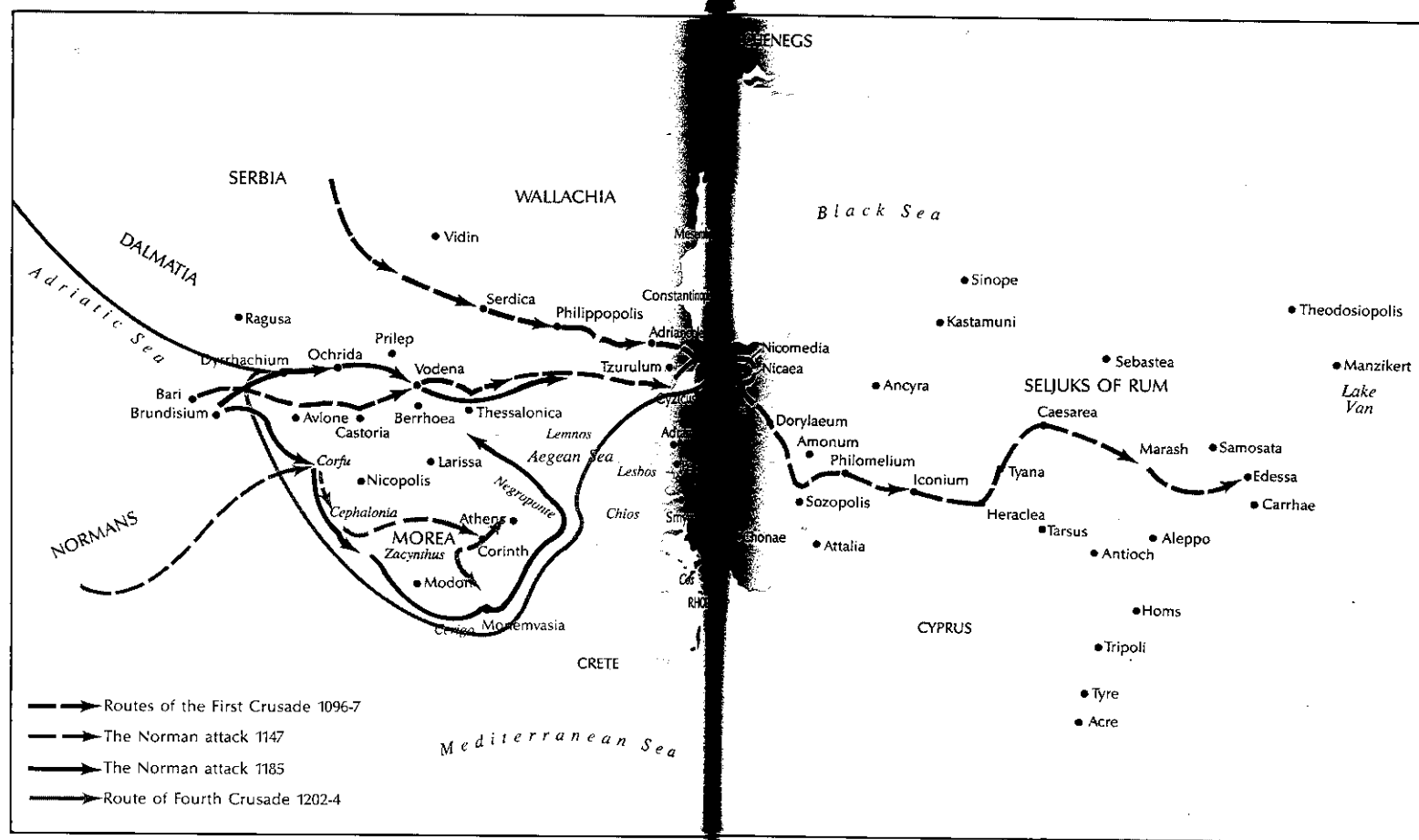
As a military culture, the Vikings were doomed to fail when their victims learned how to defend themselves. The weakness of Viking culture was that it remained largely militaristic. Only those elements of the raid that could be channeled into trade survived. Much of Viking beliefs and behavior could not. The trading outposts in Normandy, France, made it possible for Vikings' sons to conquer England and parts of Italy. By the twelfth century they were engaged in a phase of European expansion called the Crusades.

PRAYING AND PREYING: THE CRUSADES

Like any civilization, that of Western European Christendom was propelled by conflicting tensions. Like other civilizations emerging from tribal or barbarian experience, it was torn between personal and public loyalties. Like other expansive civilizations, it vacillated between raiding and trading. Like other monotheistic civilizations, it was torn between a sense of human brotherhood and a desire to enforce conformity to God's will. Its attitudes toward war and violence were polarized by these tensions. Tribal, and then feudal, moral codes demanded vengeance; states substituted laws. Trading bred partners and predators. Christianity tamed barbarian aggressiveness, but it also recruited soldiers for Christ. The Crusades were the successful attempt of the church to take over and use the feudal structure and armies for its own purposes. Documents from the eleventh century in the West reveal a sharp increase in the number of prayers for victory. In the same century we see the first records of sword blessing. Progressively, the knight was expected to live according to the religious standards of the church. Paul's phrase "fighting for Christ" (by which he had meant, and the Byzantine church still meant, a spiritual fight with "the weapons of Christ"—or no weapons at all) had become identified in the West with the service of the knights.

The first Crusade began, ironically enough, after a series of attempts by the pope and his councils to institute a "Truce of God" over rival feudal barons and their armies. Pope Urban II included in his list of reasons for a Crusade the hope that Christian knights would "fight righteous wars instead of iniquitous combats" among fellow Christians. Urban detailed other reasons for a holy war in his speech to the Council of Clermont on November 27, 1095: the Byzantine emperor had asked for help against the Arab Muslims; the Muslims not only threatened Constantinople but also occupied Jerusalem and the Holy Land; a Christian conquest of the Muslims might restore Christian rule of Jerusalem and possibly even reunite the Eastern and Roman churches, which had been separate since 1054.

It may have been true that the Byzantine emperor Alexius asked the pope for assistance against the Muslims. But if he made such a request, he was clearly



THE CRUSADES AND THE WEAKENING OF BYZANTIUM, 1096-1204
The Crusades established European outposts in the Middle East without seriously challenging Islam. At the same time they hastened the end of the rival Christian civilization in Byzantium.

thinking of the usefulness of an aristocratic army of knights. The knights (especially the Norman and Frankish second sons, who would not inherit the family lands) formed fairly disciplined armies. They hoped to do holy work at the same time that they might win their fortunes from Muslim infidels (or even Byzantine heretics).

Pope Urban's call struck a responsive chord at the other extreme of the scale of European society as well. As the pope's message was popularized by wandering, barefoot preachers like Peter the Hermit, hordes of poor people hurried out of

overcrowded areas to make their lives meaningful in holy war. Untrained and undisciplined "people's crusades" joined the armies of knights in the march across Europe to Constantinople. Before they left to exterminate "the sons of whores, the race of Cain," as they called the Muslims, the vagabond armies seized their own European towns for Christ. The Crusades began with the first large-scale massacre of Jews. "We have set out to march a long way to fight the enemies of the East," one of the Crusaders declared, "and behold, before our very eyes are his worst foes, the Jews. They must be dealt with first." In France, where Jewish communities had

gathered for centuries under the protection of Christian bishops, the mobs demanded the conversion or extermination of the Jews. In May and June of 1096 alone, between four and eight thousand Jews were massacred.

The massacre of Jews was only practice for the real business at hand. The vagabond armies that survived the long walk to Constantinople horrified the Byzantine emperor and the inhabitants of the ancient city. They had no plan or organization, and they could just as readily sack Constantinople as Jerusalem. With a little luck and a good deal of diplomatic skill, the Byzantine ruling class managed to redirect the armies of the dispossessed toward Jerusalem. Since the Muslims were disorganized and did not expect an attack as ferocious and determined as had been executed, the Crusaders were able to take the ancient city where Jesus had lived and died. The city was captured in 1099.

The fall of Jerusalem was followed by a holocaust; except for the governor and his bodyguard, who managed to buy their lives and were escorted from the city, every Moslem—man, woman and child—was killed. In and around the Temple of Solomon “the horses waded in blood up to their knees, nay up to the bridle. It was a just and wonderful judgement of God that the same place should receive the blood of those whose blasphemies it had so long carried up to God.” As for the Jews of Jerusalem, when they took refuge in their chief synagogue the building was set fire and they were all burnt alive. Weeping with joy and singing songs of praise the crusaders marched in procession to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. “O new day, new day and exultation, new and everlasting gladness. . . . That day, famed through all centuries to come, turned all our suffering and hardships into joy and exultation; that day, the confirmation of Christianity, the annihilation of paganism, the renewal of our faith!”¹³

European sources estimate that ten thousand Muslims were massacred in the wake of that first capture of Jerusalem. Muslim sources put the figure at a hundred thousand killed. Whatever the numbers, the bloodbath taught the Muslim (and the Byzantines) to hate the West as they never had before. “The west stands for war and exploitation,” a Byzantine diplomat concluded. “West Rome . . . is the mother of all wickedness.” The Muslims mourned their losses at the hands of these “Christian dogs,” and vowed to fight fire with fire. The Arab poet Mosaffer Allah Werdis poignantly expressed the pain and bitterness of the Muslims:

*We have mingled our blood and our tears.
None of us remains who has strength enough to beat
off these oppressors.
The sight of our weapons only brings sorrow to us
who must weep while the swords of war spark off
the all-consuming flames.*

*Ah, sons of Muhammad, what battles still await you,
how many heroic heads must lie under the horses'
feet!*

*Yet all your longing is only for an old age lapped in
safety and well-being, for a sweet smiling life, like
the flowers of the field.*

*Oh that so much blood had to flow, that so many women were
left with nothing save their bare hands to protect
their modesty!*

*Amid the fearful clashing swords and lances, the faces of
the children grow white with horror.¹⁴*

By the end of the eleventh century Islamic society was more stable and civilized than Europe. It produced philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, doctors, and artists with the same urgency with which Western Europe produced soldiers. The desert horsemen had brought an agricultural technology to Spain that made the land blossom more luxuriously than ever before, more (perhaps) than today. The descendants of horsemen became doctors who staffed the first faculties of European medical schools. Their philosophers taught the West Plato and Aristotle. Their merchants and mariners taught Europeans mathematics, bookkeeping, and maritime travel. In short, the Muslim civilization that was destroyed by the Crusaders at Jerusalem was considerably more sophisticated and peaceful than that of its conquerors.

Some Christian Franks who ruled Jerusalem from 1099 to 1185 realized that the Muslims were more tolerant than themselves. They were aware that Christians had for centuries held high positions in the Muslim courts of the Middle East. They found Syrian Christians who were physicians, astronomers, and officials of Muslim princes. They told stories of Muslim generosity, even in battle. One Christian, Oliverus Scholasticus, told of Sultan al-Malik-al-Kamil, who defeated one of the later invading armies of Crusaders and then gave the survivors food: “Who could doubt that such goodness, friendship and charity came from God? Men whose parents, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters had died in agony at our hands, whose lands we took, whom we drove naked from their homes, revived us with their own food when we were dying of hunger, and showered us with kindness even while we were in their power.” Some Christians, like Arnold of Lubeck, even understood that the Muslim idea of brotherhood was more tolerant than the Christian view of Jews and Muslims as Antichrists. Arnold put the following words in the mouth of a Muslim: “It is certain, even if our beliefs are different, that we have the same Creator and Father, and that we must then be brothers, not according to our faith but as men. Let us then remember our common Father and feed our brothers.”

As tolerant as the Muslims had been, however, they could not be expected to lie back after the Christian massacre of Jerusalem. They had been disorganized at



D armez a grant cupaine

P res de cuer

E tsel pac

E n tunc fu en une lande

This thirteenth-century battle scene shows mounted knights, possibly Crusaders, in combat. (University Library, Cambridge)

the time of the Christian conquest, but they were able to recapture Jerusalem by 1187, under the leadership of the Syrian sultan Saladin, who had unified Syria and Egypt. Although the Christians had launched a second Crusade from 1147 to 1149 (which began with another massacre of European Jews), Saladin treated the de-



scendants of the first Crusaders in Jerusalem with remarkable charity. Those who could afford to buy their freedom were allowed to do so. The poor were freed without payment. Later, Saladin actually bequeathed his wealth to Muslim, Jewish, and Christian poor alike.

Europe's answer was a third Crusade. This time the pope induced three of Christendom's greatest kings to lead armies against the Muslims: Frederick Barbarossa, Holy Roman emperor; Philip Augustus of France; and Richard I (the Lion Hearted) of England. They brought their personal quarrels and national conflicts with them. Only Richard (who relished war) actually made it to the Holy Land to confront Saladin. He captured Acre (just north of Jerusalem) and established a Christian outpost that was to last another hundred years (1189–1291), but he was unable to take Jerusalem. Negotiations with Saladin dragged on too long for Richard's spirited temper. To show his determination he ordered the massacre of two to three thousand of his Muslim prisoners. Then he had their bodies cut open and searched for gold, which some had swallowed. Last, but not least, he had their bodies burned so that the ashes could be sifted for any gold that might have been missed. Such atrocities soured Muslim toleration for some time.

If Muslims needed the third Crusade to learn the militant character of Western civilization, the Byzantine Greeks may have needed the fourth. Pope Innocent III asked the kings of Europe in 1202 to capture Jerusalem for the last time. However, Philip Augustus and John of England (Richard had been kidnapped for ransom in Germany) were too busy fighting each other. Lesser lords pleaded poverty, but Innocent prevailed upon them, and the city of Venice offered transportation for a percentage of the take. Once the Crusaders had set sail, the Venetian merchants and businessmen were in control. The Doge (or leader) of the city convinced the Crusaders to make a stop at Zara (which he declared had been taken from Venice by the Hungarian king). The Crusaders proceeded to loot, sack, and destroy this perfectly good Christian city. Innocent was horrified. He excommunicated the whole army, then reconsidered. Finally, he lifted the ban so that they could continue on to Jerusalem.

Tempted by a claimant to the Byzantine throne who offered the Crusaders enough to pay the Venetians if their armies would help him take Constantinople, they stopped again. Resistance was minimal, and the Crusaders were successful. But the pretender was slow in paying, or the Venetians cornered most of it. The enraged armies then conquered Constantinople for themselves. The city, which had withstood the invasions of barbarians, Hungarians, and Turks, fell in 1204 (almost a thousand years after the collapse of Rome) to a motley army of Westerners. The wars for Christ ended in the destruction of the greatest Christian city in the world. Shrines and churches were looted. Priceless art objects were melted down for metal. Altars were broken up and carried away. Mosaics were destroyed for their jewels. Manuscripts of the church and the ancient world were lost forever.

The destruction of Constantinople put an end to the Crusade for the Holy Land. The armies never left for Jerusalem. The crusading spirit, though, became a way of life. Pope Innocent himself sought to organize another Crusade in 1215. But for the most part the Crusades turned inward. They were launched against the elaborate Muslim civilization in Spain, against Roman Christian heretics in southern France, against foreign nationalities, and (as always) against the Jews. By the

end of the thirteenth century, the Crusade had a lot to do with national glory, profit, and extermination, and very little to do with prayer. The goals of Christianity had no doubt been perverted, but the shift from praying to preying had been natural and lasting.

FOR FURTHER READING

On barbarian Europe, one of the better, brief introductions is J. M. Wallace-Hadrill's *The Barbarian West*. His more recent *The Long-Haired Kings* is also valuable. The classical studies (written about fifty years ago) are J. B. Bury's *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians*, Samuel Dill's *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*, and Ferdinand Lot's *The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages*. All are still worth reading. One of the more interesting recent studies is P. R. L. Brown's *The End of Antiquity. The Dark Ages*, edited by D. Talbot Rice, brings together excellent articles. For firsthand accounts of the barbarians, the student can also take advantage of two excellent primary sources: Tacitus's *On Britain and Germany* and Gregory of Tours's *History of the Franks*.

The best study of Islam is Marshall G. S. Hodgson's *The Venture of Islam*, but its length (three volumes) and sophisticated analysis are demanding. More accessible introductions are Caesar E. Farah's *Islam*, Hugh Kennedy's *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, J. J. Saunders's *A History of Medieval Islam*, W. Montgomery Watt's *The Majesty That Was Islam*, and B. Lewis's *The Arabs in History*. For introductions to Muhammad, see W. Montgomery Watt's *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman* and Maxime Rodinson's *Mohammed*.

Given the centrality of the *Koran* to Islam, students should take advantage of the many editions now available. A useful guide is Fazlur Rahman's *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. There is also an excellent collection of primary source materials in Bernard Lewis's two-volume *Islam* and in *Islam from Within*, edited by Kenneth Cragg and R. Marston Speight.

Among the general introductions to China, Mark Elvin's *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* is especially useful for economic history. F. A. Kierman, Jr., and J. K. Fairbank have edited a valuable collection of articles in *Chinese Ways in Warfare*. C. O. Hucker's *China's Imperial Past* is an excellent overview. For the period of unification, Arthur F. Wright's *The Sui Dynasty* is a useful introduction. *Sui and Tang China, 589–906*, edited by D. Twitchett, is a thorough collection of articles.

For Byzantium, D. A. Miller's *The Byzantine Tradition* is a good brief introduction. René Guerdan's *Byzantium* is a bit more thorough. D. A. Miller's *Imperial Constantinople* is a good introduction to the city. There is also an excellent collection of primary source materials in *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*, edited by Deno John Geanakoplos.

On Western Europe, we have found the work of Georges Duby, especially *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* and *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, extremely helpful. On the peace movement see his *L'An Mil*. The work of Jacques Le Goff is also extremely insightful. See, for instance, his *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*. Philippe Contamine's *War in the Middle Ages* is a comprehensive account of combatants and weapons.

For general histories of medieval Europe, perhaps the best place to start is with Henri Pirenne's *A History of Europe*, vol. 1, a book written without the aid of libraries by the Belgian scholar while in a German prison camp during World War I. Another classic French study is Marc Bloch's *Feudal Society*. One of the more interesting of the modern approaches is Robert Lopez's *The Birth of Europe*. Norman Cantor's *Medieval History* is also strongly interpretive, and particularly useful on the medieval church. Among other histories, C. Warren Hollister's *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, Denys Hay's short *The Medieval Centuries*, and Joseph R. Strayer's *Western Europe in the Middle Ages* are fairly easy. *The Making of Europe*, by Christopher Dawson, and *Early Medieval Society*, edited by Sylvia L. Thrupp, are more sophisticated. Hugh Trevor-Roper's *The Rise of Christian Europe* and Jacques Boussard's *The Civilization of Charlemagne* are particularly well illustrated.

A few other books are especially valuable for judging the tenor of violence in medieval Europe. T. S. R. Boase's well-illustrated *Death in the Middle Ages* is rich and disturbing. J. Huizinga's classic *The Waning of the Middle Ages* is indispensable. Lynn White, Jr.'s *Medieval Technology and Social Change* is a classic account of the relationship of medieval technology and the warrior society of chivalry. For the richness of contemporary detail there is none better than John Froissart's *The Chronicles of England, France and Spain*, which was completed in 1400.

On the Vikings, there is a well-illustrated introduction in David Wilson's *The Vikings and Their Origins: Scandinavia in the First Millennium* and a very good history of their culture from 800 to 1100 in Johannes Brondsted's *The Vikings*. Other useful recent titles are P. G. Foote and D. M. Wilson's *The Viking Achievement*, G. Jones's *A History of the Vikings*, and P. Sawyer's *The Age of the Vikings*. On the Atlantic voyages, see Gwyn Jones, *The Norse Atlantic Saga*.

On the Crusades, various interpretations are brought together in J. A. Brundage's *The Crusades: Motives and Achievements*. Eyewitness accounts are available in F. T. Marzialis's *Memoirs of the Crusades*. Arab versions are presented in *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, edited by Francesco Gabrieli, and Amin Maalouf's *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*. The standard multivolume histories are K. M. Setton's *History of the Crusades* and the older work by Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*. R. A. Newhall's *The Crusades* is a brief, introductory account. The warfare of the period is described in R. C. Smail's *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193*. Finally, Norman Cohn's superb *The Pursuit of the Millennium* puts the Crusades into a broader perspective of medieval religious hysteria and relates their popular psychological dimension to modern totalitarianism.

NOTES

1. Adapted and translated from Jacques Le Goff's *La Civilisation de L'Occident Medieval* (Paris: Arthaud, 1964), pp. 31-32.
2. Salvien, adapted and translated from Le Goff, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
3. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 173-174.
4. W. Ivanow, "An Ismaili Poem in Praise of Fidawis," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 14 (1938), p. 71. Quoted in Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 130.

5. Adapted from Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 56.
6. Translated by S. Cross and O. Sherbowitz, *Russian Primary Chronicle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1953), p. 72.
7. Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, trans. in Deno John Geanakoplos, *Byzantium: Church, Society and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 113.
8. Trans. by R. Jenkins, from Leo Diaconus, *Historia*, in P. Whiting, *Byzantium: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 76.
9. Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 151.
10. Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 267.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
12. Duby, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
13. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 48-49.
14. Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World* (New York: New American Library, 1961), pp. 135-136.