

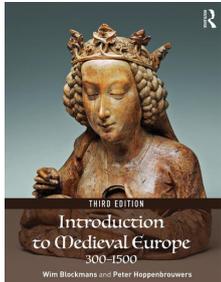


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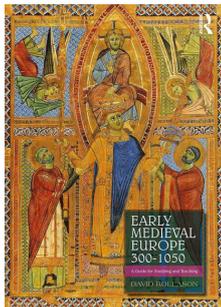
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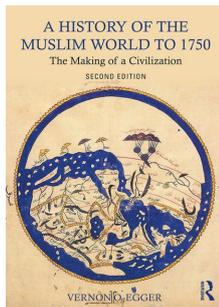
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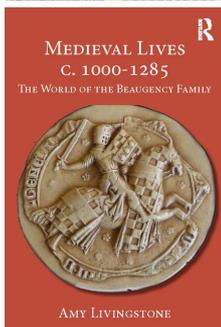
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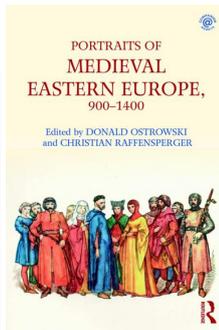
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# Introduction

## The Middle Ages as a period in European history

Try to imagine a world in which:

- population density at its highest level was less than that of present-day Russia, without the latter's infrastructure
- medical knowledge was appalling, which meant that most people died young and had to live with serious physical suffering
- people, consequently, lived under a demographic 'high-pressure' regime, which means that only by maximising fertility they were able to keep ahead of mortality
- there was an abundance of young people
- infrastructure (roads, bridges) and means of transportation were of poor quality, hence, few people ever travelled far – hence, geographical scope and mental outlook of most people were narrow
- economic production was overwhelmingly agricultural, hence, most people were peasants who lived in small villages
- technological development and mechanisation of human labour were very limited

- the Christian religion informed practically every aspect of daily life
- most people did not have any formal education, and probably could not even read or write.

Welcome to the Middle Ages! The Middle Ages are not just any part of world history taking place in any part of the globe. According to long-accepted agreement among historians, taken over in standard university curricula and standard textbooks all over the world, the Middle Ages are a period in Europe's past that roughly covers the millennium between 500 and 1500 CE. Nowadays, the term 'medieval', with 'feudal' used as a regular alternative, often represents something backward and barbaric, which then is contrasted with more splendid cultures that preceded and followed the Middle Ages. Where did such ideas come from?

### *The terms 'Middle Ages', 'humanism' and 'Renaissance'*

In fourteenth-century Italy, poets and scholars who considered themselves humanists, that is, lovers of Greek and Roman Antiquity, for the

first time expressed the belief that they were at the threshold of a new era of intellectual brilliance that would stand out sharply against the darkness of preceding centuries. The term *tenebrae* ('darkness') came from the pen of Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) (1304–1374), the famous poet who spoke of the interim period between classical Antiquity and his own time as *media tempestas*, *media aetas*, *media tempora* ('the period in-between') – all terms with a decidedly negative connotation. For intellectuals after Petrarch, this 'middle period' was nothing but an unfortunate intermezzo that was on the verge of finally turning into a new golden age, inspired by classical culture. The expression *medium aevum* ('Middle Age') was given official status much later, in 1678 to be precise, when Lord Du Cange published his two-volume *Glossarium* of Latin words used in that period that deviated from their classical meaning. Several decades later the German professor of history Kristoph Keller (Christophorus Cellarius) presented the first academic textbook on the history of the Middle Ages under the title *Historia Medii Aevi* ('History of the Middle Age'). It covered the period from Emperor Constantine the Great (306–337) to the Fall of Constantinople (1453). Soon, this became generally accepted practice in university courses on history.

Since 'Middle Ages' is a humanist construct, the success of the concept is no doubt connected to the strong development of the system of Latin schools and grammar schools for secondary education. This was where humanistic ideas fully came into their own, since the study of the classical languages, Latin and Greek, formed the basis of the curriculum. It was hoped that through the study of the biographies of famous men and of the history of ancient culture, including poetry and rhetoric, new generations would be elevated to the idealised image of the heroes of Antiquity. Besides, until well into the nineteenth century, Latin remained the language of university education, so that every intellectual was immersed in the bath of Antiquity by an active knowledge of its most important cultural carrier.

From the seventeenth century onwards, there was a renewed interest in the medieval period in Catholic countries, in particular, and there were even specific institutes founded to study the Middle Ages. By contrast, in most of the Protestant world, the Middle Ages were rather disregarded as an academic subject, so that emphasis instead could be placed on all the good that had been achieved since the Reformation. The religious divisions between intellectuals from the early modern ages thus perpetuated for ideological reasons the dividing line in history that humanists had drawn primarily on the basis of cultural-historical (literary, artistic) considerations.

In the course of the nineteenth century, historical studies developed into a scholarly discipline. As more university professorships were introduced which continued accepting the humanist dividing line just discussed, newly founded learned societies and professional journals followed, and medieval history developed into a distinctive historical specialism, with its own research agenda and its own methodology. Sometimes they were supported by national governments with national agendas. The awe-inspiring source text edition project known as the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* ('Monuments of German History'), still very much alive, was a co-initiative of Freiherr Vom Stein (1757–1831), a Prussian state minister in the confused years of the Napoleonic wars. Initially, the aim of his private academic enterprise was to find support in the Germanic medieval past for the German nobility's political importance, but soon after Stein's death the revived Prussian state started to fund the *Monumenta*, with different ideological intentions in mind. The sources of medieval history should disclose the original character and rationale of the German nation, destined to be restored in all its glory (under Prussian leadership, of course). An equally ambitious, state-sponsored project, although with a less overtly nationalist objective, was the *Rolls Series*, initiated in the 1850s. It was aimed at publishing new, scholarly reliable editions of all 'the chronicles and

memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages’.

In consolidating this situation, in which medieval history had carved out a field for itself, Jacob Burckhardt’s *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (‘The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy’) played a key role. The phenomenal success of this book, which appeared in 1860, can be explained by the elegance with which the author re-formulated the historical myth imposed upon everyone who had enjoyed more than just an elementary education: the myth that a few generations of Italian intellectuals and artists had – through a truly cultural revolution – freed Europe from the stifling bonds of a society that was all oriented towards collectivity and in which every aspect of life on earth was focused on life after death. ‘**Renaissance**’ literally means ‘rebirth’, and that rebirth refers to the restoration of ancient ideas and ideals as these were evoked in imitations of classical literature or of (supposedly) classical forms and models in buildings, paintings and sculptures. Actually, the first one to use the term Renaissance in that sense, the Florentine painter and architect Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), explicitly indicated his visionary predecessor, Giotto di Bondone (c.1267–1337) as the uncontested harbinger of this classicist movement. Compared with the loaded concept of ‘Renaissance’, ‘**humanism**’ seems more neutral and therefore easier to deal with. Strictly speaking, humanism refers to a philological procedure consisting of two parts: on the one hand, of attempts to unearth more ancient texts by intensive research in libraries; and on the other hand, of philological efforts to establish a version of those texts that resembles the original as closely as possible. In addition to this, however, humanism, as its name betrays, has a more general and certainly vaguer meaning – that of an intellectual search more focused on the ‘human factor’ and of greater interest in the human individual and his intentions and emotions.

Burckhardt concentrated chiefly on this second meaning and elevated one subjective observation

about Italian culture in the late Middle Ages – the increased appreciation for individual human achievement – to a key element in the process of revolutionary change that he detected. Since, Burckhardt’s view has been criticised and qualified from various angles. According to The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, in his *Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919), the courtly culture of the Low Countries and northern France in the fifteenth century revealed a nostalgia for the more recent past, rather than an aversion to it, or than a nostalgia that reached back to classical Antiquity – the nostalgia that pervaded the Italian Renaissance. Other critics pointed to a number of ‘renaissances before the Renaissance’ that had similar humanist features as the Italian Renaissance. The most important were the Carolingian Renaissance and the twelfth-century Renaissance.

As for the religious Reformation of the first half of the sixteenth century, the other main marker of the early modern age, we shall demonstrate that from a theological and institutional point of view, it did almost naturally follow from a long series of reform movements that began in the eleventh century. Its defining function is thus as debatable as that of the terms ‘Renaissance’ and ‘humanism’. Nevertheless, the educational establishment in Protestant countries subsequently promoted the Middle Ages in stark contrast to later times, in order to stress its singularity.

### *The Middle Ages: continuity and change; sub-periodisation; types of medieval societies*

Now that we know where the term ‘Middle Ages’ comes from, and why it has remained in use in history books and history lessons, the question arises whether there is any point in continuing to use it other than for didactic convenience. Are we still convinced that the changes that took place in European society in the decades around 1500 were fundamental enough to justify a fundamental fault line in history? In the 1970s there

was a tendency to answer that question in the negative by pointing out that the basic economic and social realities, including most people's living conditions, did not alter substantially before the Industrial Revolution, as sustained economic growth remained out of reach. But the logical conclusion to carve out a new era in history, the Pre-industrial Age, encompassing the centuries between 1000 and 1800, somehow never made it, maybe because of an unwillingness to accept economic processes as the principal determining factor in history. Neither did attempts at spreading out late Antiquity over the fifth to ninth centuries as a long-winded Transformation of the Roman World. Most specialists stick to the idea that indisputable continuities, especially in the East where the Roman Empire formally continued to exist until 1453, were more than adequately counterbalanced by sweeping changes in the social and economic order as well as in politics and religious culture to justify the start of a new historical era.

So, in a way, the Middle Ages have made a come back in professional history. It was accompanied by new research, clearly inspired by social anthropology and cultural history, to redefine the individual, distinctive character of the medieval period. At the same time it has remained important to stress how much modern Europe owes to its medieval past. So many institutions and ideas that are generally regarded as essential to both the structure of modern European societies and the mental outlook of European people go back to the formative centuries before 1500 – think of parliaments, corporations, universities, local communal self-government, the separation of secular state and organised religion, and capitalist enterprise. In our book we have tried to do justice to both viewpoints: on the one hand, to accentuate the medieval world's otherness and singularity; on the other hand, to describe that same world as our ancestors' time-space, while avoiding teleological fallacy – the world in which we live and the life that we cherish were not predestined by its medieval past; but it would have looked quite different.

Besides, static features are not making history; history by definition is a process of continuity and change in time. What changes within the chronological boundaries of the Middle Ages have been so fundamental that all aspects of society were affected by them? Among such transformations we mention the following:

- the weakening and disappearance of the Roman Empire in the West, with its centralised imperial bureaucracy, its homogenous administrative structure centred on *civitates*, and its subordinate system of production and distribution
- the constitution of Christendom as the overriding religious and ideological superstructure of European society
- relatively large-scale migrations of multi-ethnic barbarian groups, followed by the formation of proto-national 'regnal communities' (Reynolds) within the former frontiers of the western Roman Empire
- enlargement of agricultural production within the framework of various types of aristocratic large landownership, which preconditioned long-term population growth and urbanisation on a wide scale, supported by commercialisation and economic expansion, partly along capitalist lines
- the development of regular long-distance overseas trade reaching out to North Africa and Asia
- the virtual disappearance of slavery of Christians in Christian society, and other forms of unfree personal status in the most urbanised regions, which
- allowed the emergence of the commoner, the ordinary free man in possession of basic rights in towns, villages and states, the cornerstone of late medieval society in the West
- the evolution of dynastic monarchies based on personal bonds into a wide variety of institutionalised states
- the rationalisation and partial secularisation of the world view and the view of mankind

- the development of an individualised spirituality, also among the great masses of the faithful
- successive revolutionary changes in written communication in the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.

We agree with the defenders of the concept of pre-industrial societies that after the sixteenth century until the Industrial Revolution there were quantitative but not qualitative changes in these transformations. The distinction between the late Middle Ages and early modern history does not rest on fundamental differences according to type of society nor on radical breaks in social developments. Major processes, such as urbanisation and the secularisation of the world view, ran a continuous course from the eleventh century to the end of the *Ancien Régime*, or even until now. Much of what is new, 'modern', in the Early Modern Period goes back to the later Middle Ages.

In short: in this book we use the term 'Middle Ages' both for pragmatic reasons and because we think it has intrinsic merit in the sense that the millennium between 500 and 1500 contains enough distinctive and interesting processes of historical change to set it off against the period that preceded it and against the period that followed.

## *Cultural diversity*

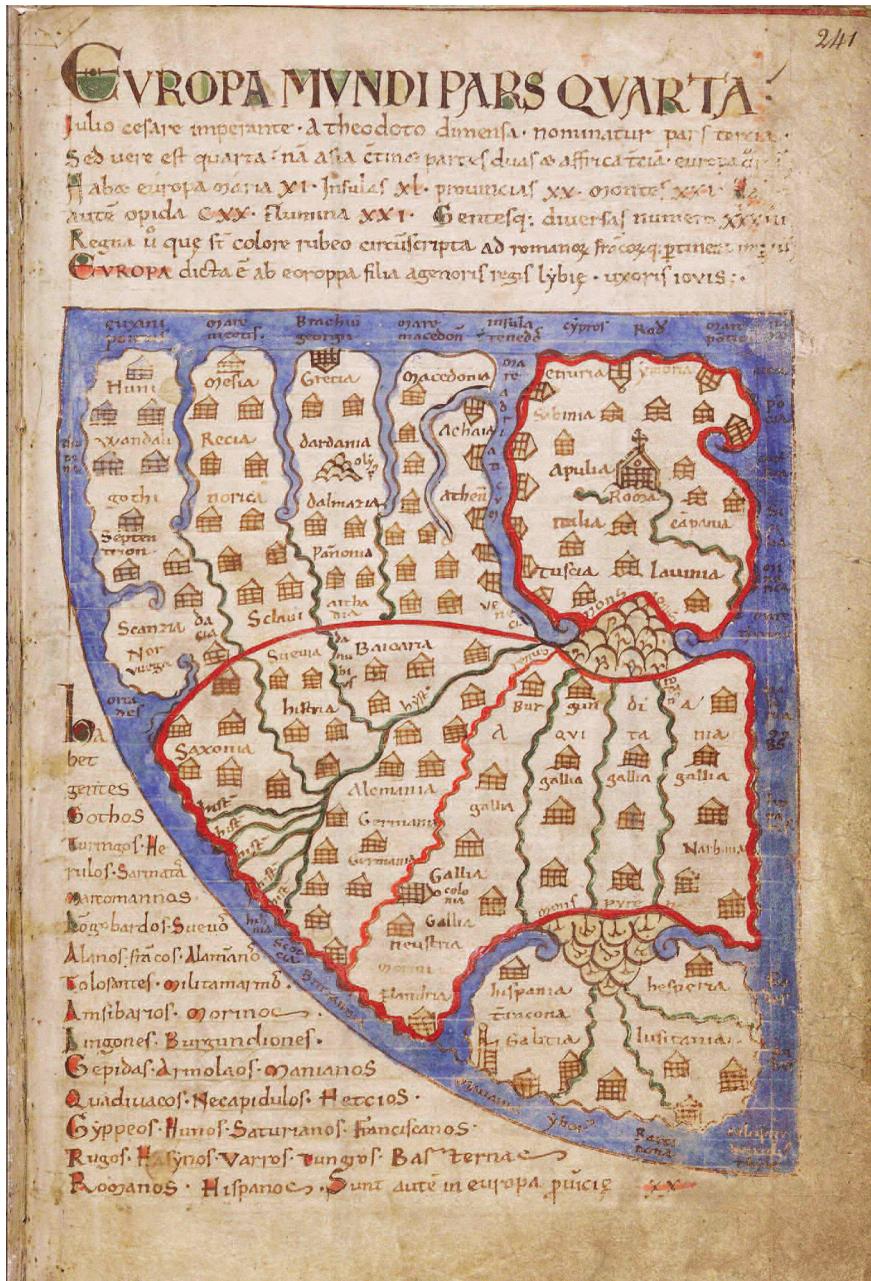
Europe's geographical variety and its relative lack of large open plains is a natural phenomenon that has most certainly contributed to the long survival of widely differing cultural niches. Even in the twentieth century, despite the strongly homogenising effects of Church and state institutions, the transport revolution and the mass media, we can identify a multitude of regional cultures that are apparent in their own organisation of material life, in their own customs and concepts, and in their own languages or dialects.

With the current trend towards globalisation it is not easy for us to realise that until the eighteenth century the horizon of most Europeans did not extend beyond the place where they lived or the region where they were born. This does not mean that nobody ever travelled, or that there was no mobility, or that there were no large-scale migrations; it was just that these were relatively uncommon. Normally, people remained for the most part tied to a particular area; this naturally resulted in considerable differences in economic development and cultural outlook.

Major coordinating intellectual, constitutional or religious constructions, such as the Church, kingship and state, with which we are nowadays familiar, or which a highly developed elite devised at the time, were far removed from everyday experience at the local and regional level. This was certainly a hindrance to the efforts at unification made by the higher political authorities. For us as historians, the same local diversity and changeability make it extremely problematic to write a comprehensive cultural history of the Middle Ages that would cover all of Europe over more than a thousand years. This has not prevented us, however, from clarifying important cultural phenomena in the successive political, socio-economic and religious chapters that are the backbone of this book. In that respect, culture, in its broadest sense of those variegated channels through which people give symbolic meaning to existence, has been provided for.

## *Which Europe?*

As we mentioned in the beginning, the historical term 'Middle Ages' by definition only has meaning in a European context, so there is no point in accusing medievalists of a Eurocentric bias. Neither are we enthusiastic about the idea – often enough aired – to export the medieval label to areas outside Europe ('medieval China', 'medieval Islam'). Yet we also have to admit that the geographically defined continent of Europe



**PLATE 0.1** The oldest known independent map of Europe, drawn around 1121 by Lambert, canon in Saint-Omer, in his richly illustrated encyclopaedia *Liber Floridus*. Europe is seen as a quarter of the world. According to classical, *Mappa Mundi* representation the upper half of the inhabited world was taken in by Asia; the fourth quarter by the third continent, Africa. The Danube, the Rhine and the Rhône can be distinguished, as well as the Alps and the Pyrenees as boundaries to the Italian and Iberian peninsulas; Rome is marked with a cross on a major building. Empirical data are ordered within an overall idealistic world view, from the Huns and Germanic peoples top left, to Greece, Germany and Gaul, all with their regions.

does not provide in all respects the most appropriate spatial framework for our considerations. For the clerical literate elite in the medieval period itself the demarcation of their world lay naturally at the frontiers of Christendom, which had run over to Asia and Africa. At the same time, even in the fourteenth century the Christian mission had not yet reached all the lands that make part of the European continent. It means that we shall have to assume expansive core areas which in some way or other asserted their superiority, often through conquest but also through peaceful cultural transfer. It also means that those core areas will get more attention than the (shrinking) peripheries.

Seen from this perspective there can be no doubt about the head start enjoyed by the Mediterranean world. Even after the decline of the Roman Empire, the losses caused by the barbarian invasions and the disruption that may at first have been created by the Arab conquests, there was still considerably more wealth and potential for development available in southern Europe than in the north. These were nourished by the sustained economic and cultural exchanges that were springing up between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East, Iberia, Sicily and southern Italy. By presenting the Mediterranean area as an economic and cultural zone of contact and transit we prevent medieval Europe from turning in on itself, so to speak.

From the thirteenth century onwards more and more Europeans crossed the frontiers of the continent of Europe. Overland journeys were made all over Asia to examine the possibilities for direct commercial links with China and India and, of course, for the further propagation of the Catholic faith. In 1291 two Genoese brothers by the melodious name of Vivaldi sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar, 'westwards to India'. It is not known whether they found America, or indeed any other part of the world, for nothing more was heard of them. But their brave initiative sprang from a tremendous drive for expansion, which their fellow townsman, Christopher Columbus,

would emulate with greater success, though with resources not much technically improved, 201 years later.

A comparable expansive core lay at the other extreme of the continent – that of the Vikings. The lead that early medieval Scandinavia had acquired in a number of respects compared to eastern and north-west Europe resulted in remarkable journeys of discovery to all corners of the world, in commercial ties with Byzantium and central Asia, and in the settlement of its people in Iceland, Greenland, North America, Russia, Britain, Ireland and Normandy. From the eleventh century, however, the expansion stagnated. Its demographic potential was apparently exhausted, and its technical advantage had been matched. The northern (and later Norman) elements were assimilated into the diverse receiving cultures without leaving any dominant trace. By contrast, the Mediterranean expansion that, viewed economically, continued until the sixteenth century shows that it was based on far firmer foundations.

The Europe that we shall study, therefore, corresponds only partially with the geographical concept of the continent. On the one hand we see large areas on its western, northern and, in particular, eastern peripheries that were only late and superficially integrated into the developments in the south and west (Christianisation, expansion and intensification of agriculture, commercialisation, urban growth, consolidation of states). On the other hand, we can not entirely understand the dynamism emanating from southern Europe without seeing it in relation to relatively advanced regions outside Europe, especially in North Africa, the Middle East and central Asia.

## From scarcity to hegemony

No clairvoyant making a prediction in 1400 about which part of the world would dominate in the future would ever have mentioned Europe. The continent had just lost one-third of its population

through a succession of plague epidemics, its religious leaders were involved in painful schisms, the Ottoman Turks were trampling over the remains of the Byzantine Empire in the Balkans, the kings in the West were at war with each other and exhausting their resources, and peasants and townspeople were rising up in great numbers against the lords who oppressed them.

The clairvoyant would more probably have named the Turkic-Mongol conqueror Timur the Lame, Tamerlane, as the future world leader. In the preceding years, Timur had established his iron authority over the enormous region stretching from the Caucasus to the Indus. He had conquered great cities like Baghdad, Edessa, Isphahan, Ankara, Aleppo, Damascus and Delhi. Perhaps our clairvoyant would have foretold the sudden death of this despot in 1405, after he had set his eyes on China. The seer may well have considered the flourishing dynasties in the Muslim sultanates of Granada, Egypt and Tunis, but he would have hesitated, for they were quarrelling among themselves and were thus not very stable, despite the glories of their courts and mosques. He might have expected the Ottoman power to expand further into the Balkans and central Europe, and to conquer Syria and Egypt, but in his days all this was still speculative.

In the end, however, he must have chosen for the Chinese Empire, consolidated as an administrative structure since the second century BCE. Did it not encompass an area as large as western Europe, cities with several hundred thousand inhabitants, a very productive agriculture and a highly developed administrative system? The Chinese had for centuries surpassed the Europeans with their technical and organisational capacities; long before 1300 they already had iron tempered with coke, gunpowder, the ship's compass, the rudder, and printed paper money issued in the emperor's name. They undertook journeys of discovery and commercial expeditions along the coast of India as far as East Africa. There was busy shipping in the China Sea and the Bay of Bengal; large numbers of Chinese traders dealing in high-quality

goods were established in foreign ports. If there were ever to be a dominant world power it would have to be China – that is what any sensible person must have thought in 1400. Yet things turned out differently: eventually, between 1000 and 1900, Europe moved from its backward position to the forefront.

In what way was Europe different from its eminent precursors? The distinction lies in the strong drive for expansion to other parts of the world. First and foremost, Europe gained an essential technical advantage over the rest of the world in the fourteenth century through the development of firearms. Advances in shipbuilding and navigational techniques brought possibilities of sailing the oceans on an unprecedented scale. The key question, then, is how this technical lead was managed once it had been achieved.

The most important difference between Europe, China and all the other highly developed regions of the world lies in the fact that there was no unitary authoritative structure in Europe. At the beginning of the fifteenth century Chinese voyages of discovery along the coast of East Africa could easily have meant that not Vasco da Gama but a Chinese admiral, Zheng He, had by 1435 already sailed round the Cape of Good Hope. But in 1434 the Chinese imperial court decreed that no more exploratory expeditions should be undertaken. The capital of the Ming dynasty had just been moved to Beijing so that the threat from the Mongols in the north could be better resisted. The capital's food supply was ensured by the completion of the Grand Canal, some 1,500 kilometres in length, which was opened in 1411 and connected the old capital, Hangzhou, with Tianjin near Beijing. This achievement required a gigantic undertaking by a state that could establish priorities in its territory and for a population that was as large as Europe's.

No single European body had at its disposal the possibilities of organising such an enormous concentration of resources to implement state decisions or completely suppress commercial initiatives. There would always be another leader

ready to venture an experiment. The dozens of kingdoms, hundreds of autonomous principalities, prince bishoprics, city states and free peasant republics, all of which governed small parts of Europe, found themselves in a constant state of rivalry, and often at full-blown war. Moreover, no single political unit was able to establish its authority permanently. Despite all the resulting devastation, the attempts to expand the means of exercising power were a stimulus to innovation. The Chinese Empire, on the other hand, was mainly occupied in preserving its internal stability. Surely, this did not preclude growth, but it was focused on internal production and marketing. Agricultural land was expanded through reclamation, and natural resources were exploited further. China's future would lay in the north-west, in the vast expanses of Xinjiang, bordering the Mongolian steppe. Sea-borne trade and industrial production were no longer favoured. Imperial rule was not restricted to the political sphere. It also controlled religion and the economy, so that it resembled a totalitarian system.

In Europe, by contrast, the religious and political spheres became more clearly separated in the later Middle Ages. Before then popes and emperors had struggled in vain to achieve supremacy, thus only proving that a truly universal European power did not exist. A relatively autonomous third power appeared in some regions during the Middle Ages, that of the towns. Towns in Europe, unlike those in other parts of the world, enjoyed an administrative and legal autonomy that expanded as the towns grew and local rulers became relatively weaker. This enabled commercial and industrial enterprise to grow without insurmountable restrictions being imposed by Church or secular authorities. They often threw up obstacles and tried to take as large a share as possible of the profits from trade. If they went too far, however, capital would take flight to a safer place where it could then grow further.

In this way the segmentation of power over a variety of political units and an independent

Church created the unique situation which gave rise to commercial capitalism. This largely autonomous method of organising trade is aimed primarily at making as large a profit as possible, through a constant search for the most lucrative combinations of production factors, for methods of risk-reduction, and for the reinvestment of profits in further expansion. Other motives – political, ethical and religious – were subordinated to these goals. It grew into a dynamic market system that was not limited to a particular area of authority but everywhere seized the opportunity to pursue profits. This exercise of power in the political, legal, religious and economic field gave merchants and entrepreneurs in Europe chances that elsewhere were often frustrated by authoritarian religious and secular rulers. And for the same reasons Europe was more open to foreign innovations than any other culture.

## Medievalism

'Medievalism' is currently used as a conceptual shorthand for all sorts of conscious references to the Middle Ages in modern culture, including popular culture. Medievalism in that sense originated in the early nineteenth century, when ideologies again started to play an important part in the view of the past. If, in the period of classicism, the medieval cathedrals and monasteries had been allowed to fall into disrepair or even to be destroyed on purpose, as happened during the French Revolution, from the 1820s it again became fashionable to build in the Gothic style and even to try to improve upon medieval builders. In France, the architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879) got involved in a great number of the most influential restoration projects, such as those of the church at Vézelay in Burgundy – one of the points of departure of the First Crusade – the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, the royal basilica of Saint-Denis north of Paris and the medieval city of Carcassonne in the Languedoc. In his view, restoration meant 'to re-establish a

building to a finished state which may in fact never have actually existed at any given time'. This vision was strongly opposed by the visionary art critic and draughtsman John Ruskin (1819–1900). For Ruskin, restoration implied the preservation of the status quo at the time of his intervention. He also propagated that, in designing new buildings, the neo-Gothic style should not be the preserve of Catholic churches but also be applied in Protestant and secular architecture. His ideas received warm support from, among others, the famous restoration architect Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811–1878), who was in charge of the restoration of the marvellous abbey of Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire – until today the fitting location for an annual medieval festival.

The highest stone towers built in Europe in the nineteenth century were those of the Gothic Revival cathedrals in Ulm and Cologne. The newly built Houses of Parliament in London and Budapest are neo-Gothic gems, as are the town halls of Vienna and Munich. The past was thus coloured according to the preferences of the following centuries. In these cases, choosing for the Gothic style meant a reference to the medieval origins of parliamentarianism and civic rights with the aim of enhancing the prestige of the newly emerging constitutional, liberal and national states. After having been neglected or even execrated for centuries, the Middle Ages – that is, the image constructed of them – were now extolled.

The idealistic representation of the Middle Ages found its clearest expression in the architecture of churches. Until deep into the twentieth century, entirely new buildings were erected in neo-Romanesque or neo-Gothic style, to enhance the particularity of churches in a modernist environment. In midtown New York, the harmoniously neo-Gothic Catholic Saint Patrick's cathedral was built between 1858 and 1865; the spires were finished in 1888. Right in that year, the Episcopal diocese of New York was planning its new cathedral, Saint John the Divine. This building was to arise sixty blocks farther north in

a more traditional Byzantine-Romanesque style. After completion of the central dome in 1909 the sponsors suddenly decided to change to a high gothic French-styled design. As it was opened in 1941, the nave was one of the largest in the world. However, up to the present day, the cathedral remains unfinished with two half-grown spires in the west front and a strange unachieved mish-mash in the crossing. To make the situation look even more medieval, between 1922 and 1930 the huge Riverside Church, a refined imitation of the cathedral of Chartres, arose on a gorgeous site just a few blocks further. In this curious duel fought by means of medieval symbolism in the then most modern city of the world, the sponsorship of John D. Rockefeller Jr. proved far more effective than the believers' donations to Saint John the Divine.

In literature, Romantic authors like Walter Scott, Heinrich Heine and Victor Hugo seized eagerly upon medieval stories to present the greatness of a medieval past, in contrast to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the French revolutionaries. Projected into this past were conservative values such as kingship, Church and nobility, and a corporative social order, but also liberal ones such as civic freedom and national character, depending on what was required. Musicians used the newly edited medieval sources as basic material for the scenarios of widely applauded operas. Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) was the most influential Italian composer who systematically chose historic themes to disseminate a nationalistic message in his divided country, of which the northern provinces were under Austrian rule until 1866. Many of his operas dealt with medieval themes, from his very first one, *Oberto, conte di Bonifacio* (1837–1838) to his last one, *Falstaff* (1889–1893). His contemporary Richard Wagner (1813–1883) used various Norse sagas as well as the epic poem *Das Nibelungenlied* as the basis for his series of operas, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ('The Ring of [the] Nibelung').

The medieval inspiration continued to function during the twentieth century in various popular

domains. The Oxford professor in English literature, J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973), was a specialist in early Germanic literature and mythology, especially the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*. Here (as well as in Wagner's operas) he found inspiration for his best-selling novels *The Hobbit* (1937) and, especially, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955), which has become one of the most widely read books on earth. Recently, both were turned into blockbuster movies and mega-selling computer games. Meanwhile, *Beowulf* itself provided the material for several movies, as did other heroes and heroines from medieval history, legendary (King Arthur, Robin Hood) or real (Alexander Nevskij, William Wallace, Jeanne d'Arc, King Henry II and Eleanore of Aquitaine, Chinggis Khan). Each time again, historical novels and historical movies on the Middle Ages prove that the medieval period is a great purveyor of base material for fascinating fiction, but also that medieval history – like all history – can be easily abused to support nationalistic claims.

## The book's arrangement

In our presentation of medieval history in this book, the transformations that we listed in the beginning are important themes, although for the sake of clear arrangement we chose to start from the traditional tripartition early Middle Ages (covering the years 300–1000), central Middle Ages (1000–1300) and late Middle Ages (1300–1500). Within each part there are chapters on political, economic and social, and religious and cultural aspects. We have opted for a periodisation in which emphasis is placed on transitions rather than sharp breaks, on processes of far-reaching change within which elements of the old society exist alongside the new. Three themes that overlapped the latter two sub-periods (together the second half of the Middle Ages), namely the start of European expansion, the astonishing intellectual accomplishments, and urbanisation and the constitution of urban society are treated in separate chapters between the central and late Middle Ages parts. This gives a total number of twelve chapters, which coincides with twelve course weeks in many academic history curricula.

# 1 Why study this period?

## Formative character

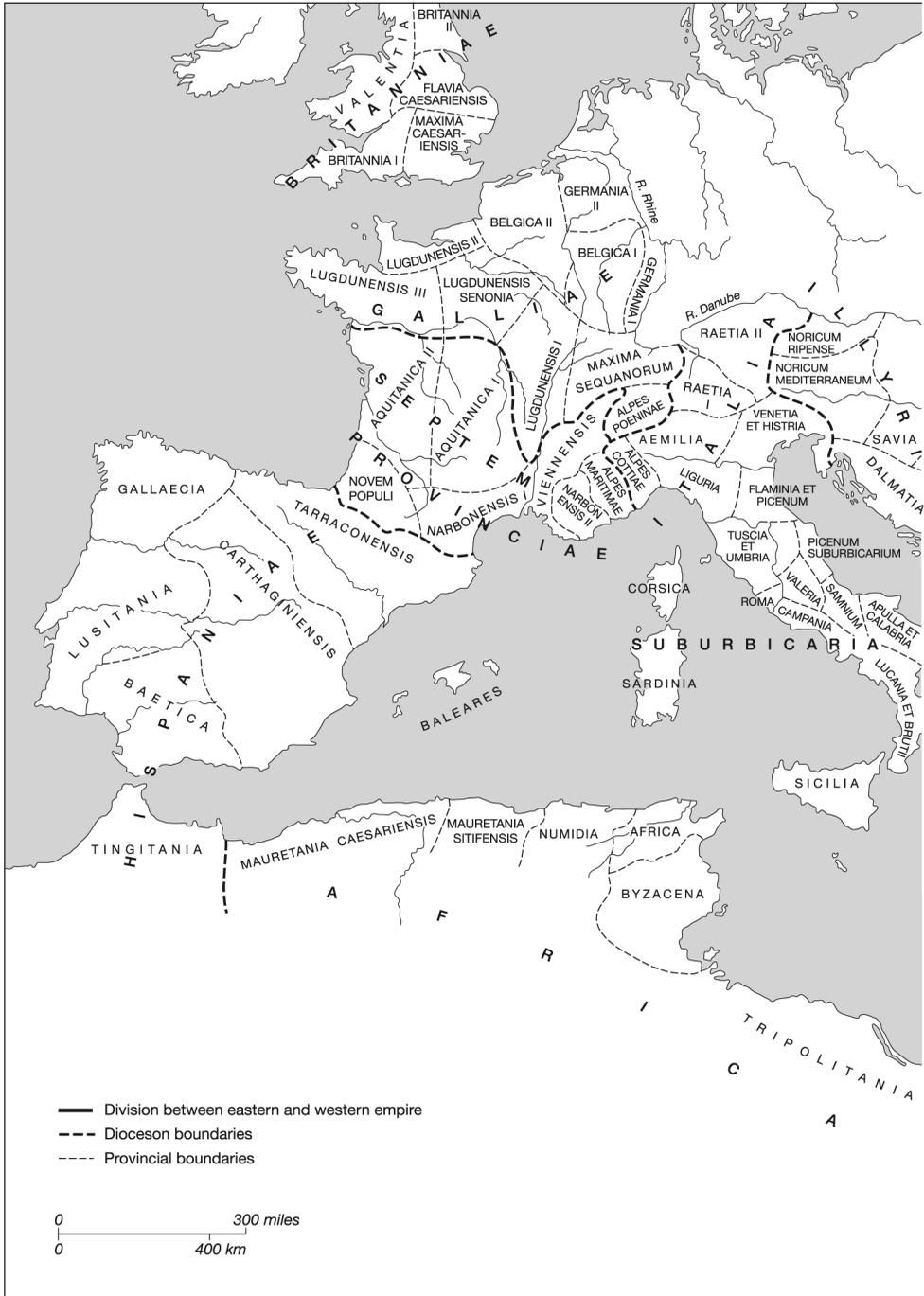
The intention of this book is to explore how far for the development of Europe, in political, religious, cultural, social, and economic terms, the period from 300 to 1050 was one of the most formative in its history. Fully to appreciate that, we need to consider not just Europe itself, but also its wider context. Europe was by no means an island, but was always closely connected to the lands to the east, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, and to the south, equally bordering that sea and extending to the fringes of the Sahara Desert. It is for that reason that this book, focused as it is first and foremost on Europe, also contains a chapter discussing the Arab conquests of the seventh century (Chapter 4).

As regards the formative character of the period which it covers, consider, first, how in 300 Europe and the Middle East were dominated politically by the Roman Empire on the one hand, and the Persian Empire to the east. The former's frontiers stretched from the Atlantic Ocean on the west to the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates on the east, from Hadrian's Wall in the north, to the Atlas Mountains of North Africa in the south (Map 1.1).

The Persian Empire, which was at that time ruled by a dynasty called the Sasanids, adjoined it on the east, and extended eastwards, around the southern shores of the Caspian Sea and the northern shores of the Persian Gulf as far east as the mountains of the Hindu Kush (Paropamisus Range) and modern Afghanistan (Map 4.1).

Now consider the situation in 1050, when the political map of Europe and the Middle East was very different. In place of the unitary might of the Roman Empire, the western section of which had come to an end in the late fifth century, a series of often very fragmented kingdoms had come into existence in Western Europe, and we can perhaps dimly perceive underlying this development the beginnings of modern political geography, with the kingdoms of France, England, and Germany, for example, already appearing in embryonic form (Map 1.2).

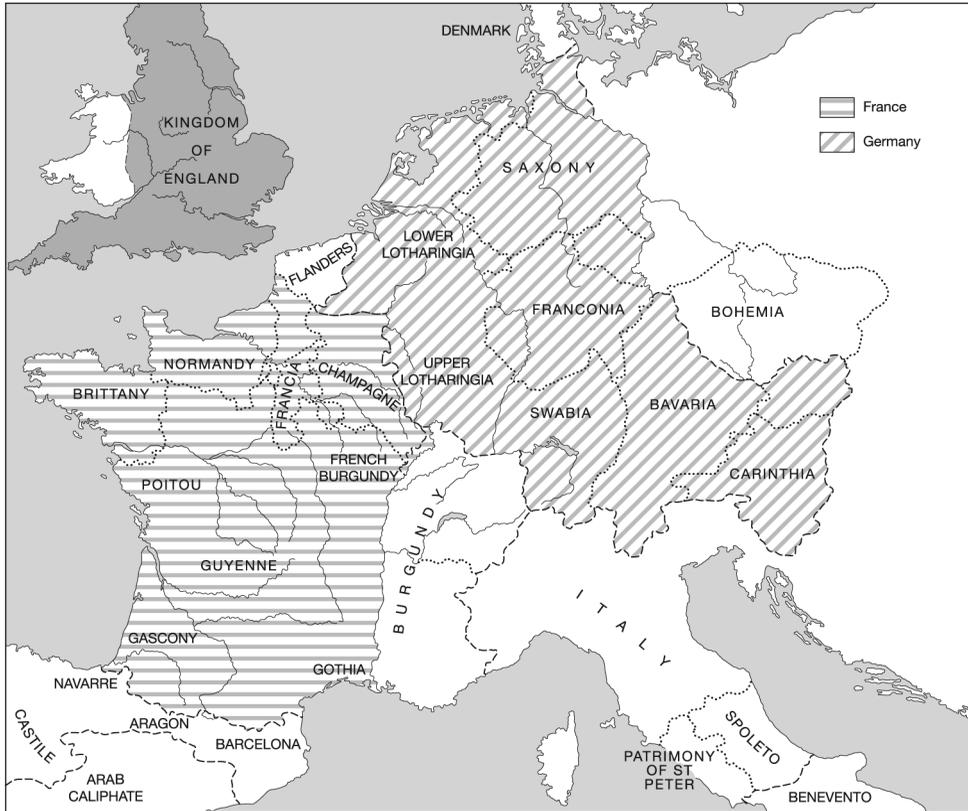
Developments in the eastern Mediterranean had been equally far-reaching. After the break-up of the Roman Empire in the West, the Roman Empire in the East continued to exist as an important state, with its centre in the great city of Constantinople (modern Istanbul); and, from the sixth century onwards, it is generally known to modern scholarship as the Byzantine Empire, and I shall follow that practice in this book. It was itself reduced in size when, following the rise of Islam in the early seventh century, Arab armies robbed it of the provinces of Syria, Egypt, Libya, Tripoli, and the remainder of North Africa, as well as destroying the Persian Empire and taking over its lands. In 711, Muslims from North Africa invaded Spain, where the Byzantine



Map 1.1 The extent of the Roman Empire. The governmental units called provinces and dioceses are marked as in Late Roman documents.

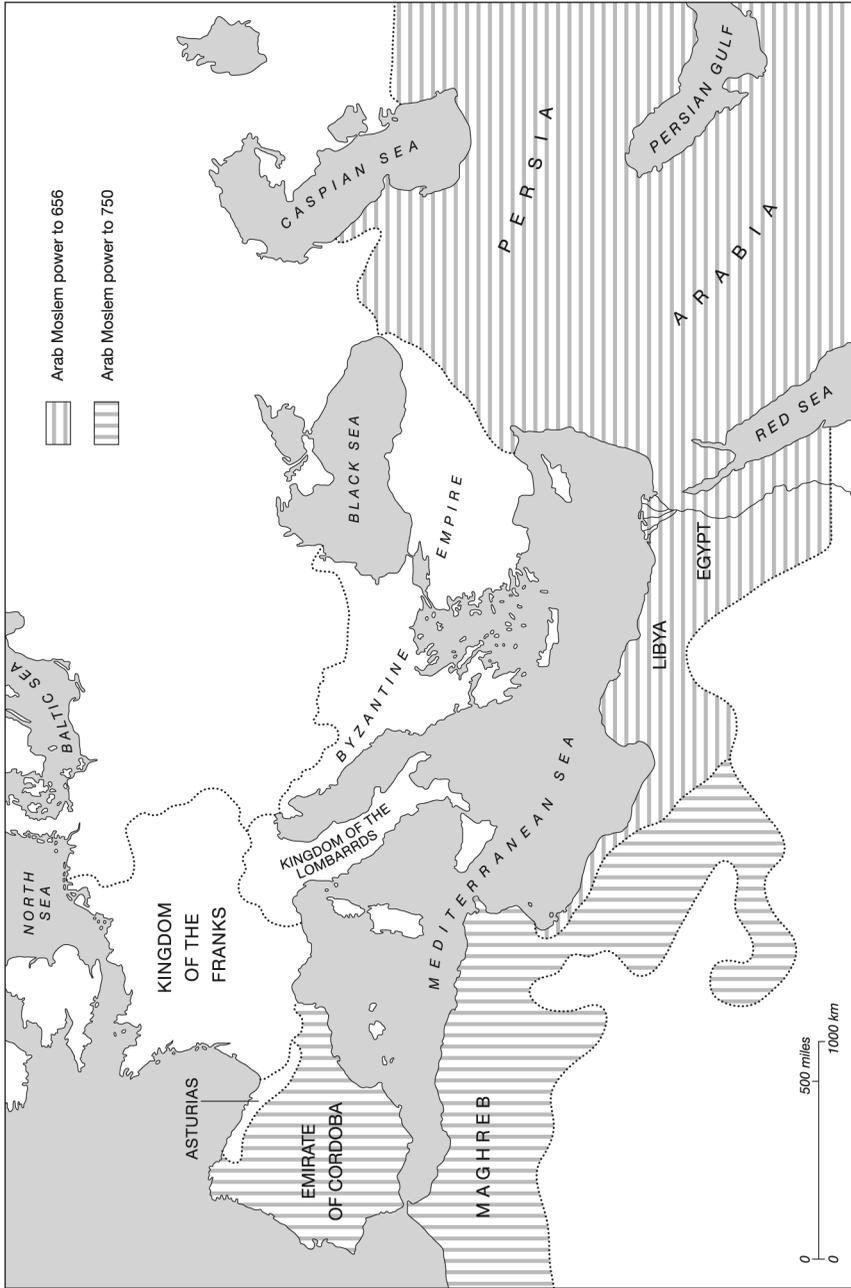


## Introduction



*Map 1.2* Western Europe around 1000–50. What was to become France as we know it was divided into a series of duchies such as Flanders, Normandy, and Aquitaine, and Aquitaine itself was subdivided into Poitou, Guyenne, and Gascony; but nevertheless it was at least notionally under the rule of a king whose centre of power lay in the area around Paris, that is the Île de France, or ‘Francia’ as it was known and is marked on this map. Germany was also fragmented into duchies such as Saxony, Swabia, and Franconia, but nonetheless a clear political distinction was emerging between the western and eastern parts of Western Europe. To the east lay areas such as Bohemia whose status and connection to Germany were still fluid. To the south, lay the kingdom of Italy, also very fluid and occupying broadly northern Italy, with duchies such as Spoleto to the south, and also the ‘Patrimony of St Peter’, which was the pope’s lands, the nucleus of the future papal states. To the south-west of the Pyrenees, the Christian kingdoms and counties of Navarre, Aragon, and Barcelona (with Leon-Castile to the west of this map) were pressing against the Arab caliphate and emirates to the south.

Empire still had a foothold, destroyed the kingdom of the Visigoths there, and subjected almost the whole of the Iberian peninsula to their rule. The Byzantine Empire was reduced to Asia Minor, the Balkans, and parts of Italy and the Mediterranean islands. Its eastern provinces and the whole of the former Persian Empire became part of the Arab caliphate, centred first at Damascus under the Umayyad caliphs (661–750) and then at Baghdad under the ‘Abbasid caliphs (Map 1.3; Map 3.1). These conquests laid the foundations for the spread of Islam, even though the speed of that spread remains a matter of debate.



**Map 1.3** Expansion of the Arab Muslims. The horizontal shading shows the expansion of Arab Muslim power down to 656, including the Byzantine provinces of the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Empire. The vertical shading shows its expansion down to 750, including the kingdom of the Visigoths. Spain is now entirely under Muslim control, apart from the kingdom of Asturias in the north. The River Indus is almost the limit of Muslim power in the east, beyond the eastward extent of this map. Notice the rump to which the Byzantine Empire is reduced, consisting of Asia Minor and the Balkans, although the latter was fragmented by the incursions of Slavs.

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The frontiers of the Byzantine Empire were certainly not unchanging after this, for much of its territory in Asia Minor was lost to the invading Seljuk Turks in the late eleventh century; but in essence the empire remained as a political force in the eastern Mediterranean down to 1453, when its principal city, Constantinople, was captured by those Turks, and the empire was destroyed. Similarly, the Arab caliphate experienced a process of disintegration beginning already in the late eighth century, so that by 1050 the caliph at Baghdad was no more than a figurehead, with his former lands divided into a series of effectively independent states, including in Egypt a line of rival caliphs, the Fāṭimids.

Nevertheless, the basic pattern was still one of incipient kingdoms in Western Europe, the Byzantine Empire seeking at least to dominate the eastern Mediterranean, and Muslim rulers in power over a vast area embracing North Africa, the Middle East, and the lands eastward to Afghanistan and Central Asia, and southwards to the Persian Gulf. The change from a unified *pax Romana* imposing a political and cultural unity on the lands around the Mediterranean Sea to a situation in which they were split between Christian states on the one hand and states embracing Muslim culture and political structures on the other was to dominate the subsequent centuries, very obviously in the period of the Crusades from around 1100, but arguably down to the present day. In the light of this sketch, we may well think that the events of this book's period were potentially formative for Europe in subsequent centuries, and into the modern period, and we shall need to ponder their significance.

We may also be seeing crucially formative changes in the development of political institutions. In 300, Europe and the lands around the Mediterranean Sea were dominated by the institutions of the Roman Empire, the emperor or co-emperors at least notionally at its head, and the exercise of power in the hands of a paid civil service and a standing army. In the Persian Empire, a similar system prevailed. By 1050, although emperors still ruled in the Byzantine Empire, Western Europe was dominated by kings, their households, and their military followers. Although Roman writers knew of kings as the leaders of their barbarian allies or enemies, kingship as we know it may have begun in this period, including the shaping of its rituals, regalia, and ideology. Certainly, the 1953 coronation ceremony of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom had its roots in the ninth century, when the various rituals of the ceremony first appeared, notably in the inauguration ceremony of Charles the Bald, king of West Frankia (840–77), in broadly what is now France. Was the period of this book then one in which the political structures of Europe were shaped in broadly the form in which they were to remain for centuries to come?

Social and economic organisation may have been changed in this period in similarly radical ways. Although modern scholars have sometimes emphasised the European aristocracy's continuity with the Roman world, the change in its character and structure was nevertheless striking, and many of its branches believed that they had originated in the course of this period, notably in the ninth century. In the Byzantine Empire, likewise, we need to ponder how continuous was the life of the aristocratic elite, and how far here too our period was one of long-lasting change.

The organisation of rural life no doubt owed something to the Roman past; but, by 1050, we may be seeing in many parts of Europe the manors, villages, and pattern of fields, in which rural life was to endure until the agricultural and industrial revolutions of the modern age. As for urban life, there has of course been a major transformation produced by modern industrialisation; but we may nevertheless be seeing the origins

of the pattern of much modern urban development in this period, not least the concentration of cities in the valleys of the Rhine and adjacent rivers, and in north Italy, and the emergence already by 1050 of cities like London, York, Dublin, and Paris, as well as Muslim cities such as Córdoba in Spain. And we shall need to ponder the significance for the development of Europe as a whole of the vigorous, long-distance trading activity which may have grown up in the Muslim lands, with their close connections with the Mediterranean Sea on the one side, and the lands stretching eastwards to Central Asia on the other.

Most dramatic of all, however, was the change in religion. In 300, the Roman Empire was dominated by the paganism of the classical world, which had often absorbed and made its own the pagan cults of indigenous Celtic inhabitants. By 1050, Christianity, which had in 300 been a minority religion, until very recently the victim of campaigns of bloody persecution, had secured a monopoly as the religion of Europe, even in lands outside the former Roman Empire, like Ireland which had been converted to Christianity already in the fifth century, and Scandinavia which was converted by the early eleventh. Intolerant of other religions, Christianity had succeeded in crushing both classical paganism and Germanic, barbarian paganism, and it had become the defining characteristic of European civilisation. Europe was Christendom by 1050, and its eastern frontiers were frontiers against pagans beyond. Only in Spain was Christianity challenged, there by the religious and political power of Islam, following the conquest of Spain by Muslims from north Africa at the beginning of the eighth century. Indeed, the other great religious change of our period had been the rise of Islam, which by 1050 dominated the lands of the Arab caliphate in North Africa and the Middle East. The Muslim-Christian divide was a product of our period.

In the case of Christianity, its dominance was not just a matter of belief. It was also a matter of organisation and wealth. Some bishops were certainly already functioning as 'prince-bishops', and the popes had gone a long way to achieving a position of dominance in Western Europe at least. A similar pattern may have been evident in the Byzantine Empire, although there the position comparable to that of the pope was occupied rather by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Also, monasticism, originating in the Nile Valley in the fourth century, had risen to considerable prominence in the Christian lands, with a dense distribution of monasteries and an astonishing proportion of the productive land in their hands.

As for the learning, scholarship, and culture of Europe, this new dominance of Christianity may have proved seminal for the way in which the learning of the ancient world was transmitted across the centuries, fused with new Christian scholarship, in forms which were to shape European culture throughout the Middle Ages. This culture was largely founded on the Latin language in the West, and increasingly on the Greek language in the Byzantine Empire, as Roman classical culture had been. But our period also saw the rise of the vernacular languages. The very first texts in the ancestor-languages of French and German belong to the ninth century, as does one of the earliest texts in the Old Norse language of Scandinavia. The earliest texts in Old English belong to the eighth century, and that language came to be widely used in writing from the ninth century onwards. As for the Muslim lands, the rise of Arabic as a scholarly and literary language, the language of the Qu'rān and the commentaries on it, belongs firmly to our period.

In this book, we need to explore the case for the importance, or otherwise, of these changes. Modern scholars have refined our understanding of their nature and extent,

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and they have sometimes disputed their importance. We need to examine their findings in depth, and we need to be aware that we are everywhere surrounded by controversy and debate. We shall have to argue whatever case we choose to make – powerfully and vigorously. But there can be no doubt that, however we might want to answer the questions raised, however much we might want to finesse our answers and conclusions, we are looking at a period which is potentially a central one for understanding what Europe is and has been.

This period is, however, arguably crucial to our understanding of history more widely. We can study it for the joy of discovery, for the fascination of looking at a remote and often exotic period. But we should never forget that it has been of crucial and often sinister relevance to political ideas and ideologies up to the present day. The imperial robes of the emperor Napoleon were decorated with jewelled insects inspired by those found in the tomb of the fifth-century king Childeic; Napoleon's predecessors who ruled France through the later middle ages and the early modern period believed that the oil used in their coronations was miraculously the same oil used to baptise their first Christian predecessor, Clovis, king of the Franks (c.481–c.511). The ideologues seeking to build a late medieval German nation drew on Roman writers of our period, and Hitler and his fascist colleagues used the history of Germanic peoples in and before our period as the basis of their ideology of the Aryan race. History, however remote, is never irrelevant and never neutral. This period has had more than its share in the shaping of European political ideology, and an understanding of it is crucial to appreciating how that developed.

### Challenges to study

At first glance, the study of such a remote period can be daunting. There are few archives of records surviving, and there never were helpful documents such as censuses, or guides to popular feelings such as newspapers, which are the life-blood of the history of the modern period. In some parts of Europe, notably Scandinavia, there was little or no use of writing at all for most of the period. In the Middle East, evidence is extremely difficult to evaluate for the period of the origins of Islam and the Arab conquests; while in the Byzantine Empire there is an almost complete lack of documentary sources. The volume of evidence is thus spectacularly less than that for modern centuries, when the problem for historians is often its sheer scale rather than its scarcity.

But that presents a challenge rather than a handicap, for it offers you the possibility of mastering a significant proportion of that evidence. And, given the remoteness of the period, it is rich and vivid. It includes unrivalled writers of history, such as the sixth-century Gregory of Tours, whose *History of the Franks* provides a rich picture of royal and aristocratic life in the area of modern France and western Germany, or the Arabic writer al-Balādhurī, who has left us a rich account of the Muslim conquests, or the eighth-century Bede, whose *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is justly celebrated as a subtle, wide-ranging, and influential work. We possess in addition, for example, accounts of the lives and deaths of saints, detailed surveys of landed estates and the peasantry who lived on them, and documents casting light on the organisation of land and power. Limited as such evidence often is in its scope, its vividness is often astonishing.

Moreover, the small size of this base of evidence and the remoteness and strangeness of the period will compel you to analyse it deeply and imaginatively in a way which is

rarely possible for students of more modern periods. You need to think of our sources as radio stations broadcasting from the past. To what channel are they tuned? In whose interests were they written? What were their underlying purposes, and what light can that cast on the mentality and patterns of thought of those who wrote them?

For this period you will also be forced to move beyond written evidence. You will need to treat surviving buildings, monuments, and art-objects as every bit as important. Why were they created in the way that they were? What message were they intended to convey and to what audience? What light do they cast on the ideas and outlook of those who created them, those who commissioned them, and those who saw them? You will need to know them, to explore them, to appreciate their significance every bit as much as you will need to look closely at our written sources. And you will need to be broad-minded and imaginative. When the great King Offa of Mercia (757–96) built an enormous earthen dyke between England and Wales, for example, was he establishing a practical military frontier or was he seeking to rival the long-dead ruler of Denmark, his supposed ancestor King Offa of Angeln, who had similarly created a frontier in Denmark? When the gruesome story of maiming, rape, and decapitation which is the story of Weyland the Smith was carved on the whalebone casket known as the Franks Casket alongside a carving of the visit of the Three Kings to Christ (Figure 12.2), what pattern of ideas was present in the mind of the carver and his patron? Why did the caliph al-Mansūr (754–75) choose to build his new capital of Baghdad in the form of a geometrically circular city, and why was the magnificent bath-house of Qusayr ‘Amra built in the Syrian desert, probably by the caliph Hisham (724–43), decorated with paintings of naked women and hunting scenes?

As these questions suggest, you will need also to range beyond the areas of expertise sometimes regarded as those of history, to engage with the dating and technical analysis of buildings, sculpture, and painting, and with archaeological excavation to understand the evidence which it has produced, especially since the Second World War. You will need too to understand the approaches of literary scholars to the poetry of this period, including *Beowulf*; to have some appreciation of coins as evidence for the past; and to have some insight into the work of anthropologists, whose conclusions about peoples in the modern age have often been applied by scholars to the development of the society of Europe in our period.

All too often, however, you will need to be aware of the limitations of our evidence for the past. Too often, it tells us only about the social elites rather than about the bulk of people, too often it tells us about men and not about women, and always it presents real challenges in probing the attitudes and thoughts of people in the past, especially those who did not belong to literate circles. What attitude, for example, did they have towards the Roman Empire? Did they perceive that any real change had occurred when it ceased to exist as such? Was their psyche affected by the consciousness of a lost golden age of that empire, as was the case for the learned men of the Renaissance period? Much as this book seeks to raise questions, there will still be many more, such as this one, which you can and should raise as you ponder the course of history.

## **This book's aims**

### *The outline of history*

This book is thematic rather than narrative because its primary aim is to explore the fundamental questions posed by the study of early medieval Europe. But, of course,

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it is important to have at least a broad chronological grasp of what happened in the seven and a half centuries with which it is concerned. So its companion website ([www.routledge.com/cw/rollason](http://www.routledge.com/cw/rollason)) contains a summary of narrative histories of the principal states of Europe in the period in question, supported by maps and timelines. If you are unfamiliar with the period, you should start there before you tackle the book itself. That said, the book seeks to assist you at various points with the chronological framework by sketching the essence of what you absolutely need to know about the chronological basis of what is being discussed. In addition, every part of the book has a timeline relevant to its theme. Even so, you may find it helpful to make constant reference to the website, where everything discussed in the book can be seen set in its chronological context.

Alternatively, you can use one of the many textbooks which adopt a chronological approach. Limiting as that is for the formulation and exploration of historical questions, which is what we are aiming at, you may find it helpful for orientating yourself. The clearest narrative account of the period as a whole is a venerable textbook by R. H. C. Davis, revised with additional sections updating the interpretations of each chapter (Davis and Moore, 2006). More modern accounts are provided by Collins (2010) and Innes (2003); both are rather dense, and the latter more a work of analysis than a narrative account. A survey by Wickham (2009) considers the Middle East as well as Europe, and is also more analytical than descriptive. All three of these modern works are useful to read, but they do not do the job of giving you instant familiarity with the whole period as well as Davis does. Brief, easy-to-read accounts, but which are rather thin on material, are those by Rosenwein (2009) and Olson (2007). The quite different type of survey by Julia M. H. Smith (2005) is a more specialised work; it is probably not the best starting-point, but it deals in depth with particular issues, notably gender (ch. 4). Similarly, Sarris (2011) provides fairly detailed narratives of the various areas and kingdoms in the period 500–700, interspersed with analytical passages on, for example, the nature of Germanic kingship (ch. 3.2). Brown (2002) is a stimulating survey, concentrating on religious history, but also discussing other topics.

Although there are historical maps in this book itself, and more on the companion website, printed historical atlases are extremely useful not only for mastering the political changes in the broad shape of Europe, but also for appreciating the inter-relationships between different states, the importance of land-routes, river-routes, and sea-ways, and other aspects of the geographical context. Useful general ones are Mackay and Ditchburn (1997), Almond et al. (1994), and Barraclough (1990). The best for our purposes, however, are Moore (1983) and the *Großer Atlas zur Weltgeschichte* (Anon., 1997). The second of these has the drawback of being in German but, if you can cope with that, it is a brilliant atlas with very illuminating, detailed maps. There are, however, a number of maps in the text of this book.

### Questions, models, and experiments

The real aim of this book, however, is to direct your attention to big questions of history in the context of this period. Why do people live as they do? Why do they think as they do? Why do they believe what they believe, and why do particular practices arise from those beliefs? Why do they accept authoritarian political structures which are, in the history of mankind, quite recent? Why is economic production organised as it is, and why are some economically subservient to others? Questions

like these relate to all human history, and the answers you may get when you pose them of a period as remote as 300–1050 can still be relevant to our perception of human life and human society today. But, because the period is so remote, you can take nothing for granted, and so you are more likely to ask the big questions in a probing way.

To understand how it is possible to tackle them, it is important to appreciate that history is more like science than many other ‘humanities’ subjects. Just as scientists begin with a hypothesis about how some aspect of the universe works and then test out that hypothesis by running experiments, so historians begin with hypotheses – we shall call them models – about how human society functioned. With the model formulated, it needs testing alongside the various types of evidence which remain from the past – the records, chronicles, coins, archaeological sites, buildings, art objects, and so on. Is that evidence consistent with the model? If it is not, the model will have to be rejected or modified and tested again. If it is, then the model can stand, although others will be constantly seeking to disprove it or reshape it, as they seek to look at the past in different ways, to draw new evidence into play in connection with the model, or indeed to bring in new evidence (like the results of archaeology) or evidence which has been ignored (like the mysterious text overlooked in some ancient library). Of course, historians are inevitably biased by the preoccupations which each new generation brings to the past; but this is not an excuse for sloppy approaches to the evidence.

### *Sources and methods*

To run the experiments in science you need the test-tubes, the fundamental particle accelerators, and the electron microscopes, and you need to know how to use them. In history too, you need the techniques to run experiments. You need to understand what our sources can or cannot tell us, how they are constructed as they are, and what can be known about their dates, who created them, and so on. A whole series of technical skills (called on the Continent auxiliary sciences) exists to make this possible. Palaeographers, for example, are specialists in handwriting and can date what scribes in our period wrote, often quite precisely, and sometimes can even name the scribes. Codicologists understand the way that manuscript books were made from calves’ leather or sheep’s leather, and they can discover how the texts which have been preserved in these books came to be there and how they related to each other. Numismatists specialise in the study of coins and understand when particular issues of coins were made, how they were made and how they relate to each other, and how much precious metal was used in them. Art historians understand the dating, origin, and meaning of works of art and buildings from the past. Archaeologists specialise in the physical evidence of the past, whether it is the grains of pollen from the earth of an early settlement, or the palace of a king, or the bones of animals in the rubbish-pits of a town. And archaeoclimatologists specialise in the history of climate change and have, for example, identified a remarkably favourable period of climate (the French call it the ‘thermal optimum’) in the middle part of our period. Historians have to draw on all these ‘auxiliary sciences’. They cannot possibly master all or even any of them, and this book is certainly not asking you to do so. But it is aiming to give some understanding of how they work and of the sort of things which they can – or cannot – tell us about the past.

14 *Introduction**The progress of research*

To assist you to read and explore further, perhaps in quite different directions from those followed in this book, every chapter has a section devoted to 'Research and study', which aims to list and comment briefly on the most helpful, exciting, and accessible books and papers. The sections provide guidance at two levels, first to broad approaches, and then to more specialised investigations if you want to go further. They are not intended to be comprehensive, and you must explore further and in whatever directions you wish, following up the references in the footnotes and bibliographies of the works you are reading. You need nevertheless to realise that the number of works published is huge, and you should not even try to read all of them. Your key aims must be to have a clear view of what questions you are seeking to answer as you read, and how the evidence we have might be used in connection with them. The 'Research and study' sections are intended to help by formulating questions, although you must feel free to formulate questions of your own as your experience and confidence increase.

*Being confident*

All this requires a confidence which at the beginning you may find hard to acquire. So, if there is one over-arching aim of this book, it is to engender that confidence. The history of this period, as of any other period, is overshadowed at every turn by great authorities from the past and the present, whose contribution is or was very great in terms of the research they have undertaken and the ideas they have explored. But history is not made by individuals, however distinguished, and its continuing vigour depends on your willingness to form your own ideas and interpretations, to ask your own big questions, and to look at the writings of any authority in the spirit of what is wrong with them rather than in a spirit of deference and acceptance.

That is above all what this book seeks to encourage you to do. Everything you do must of course refer to the evidence available, it cannot be merely speculative, but you must not be inhibited in developing original ideas, reviving old ones, or differing from the views of established authorities. You need to engage with the evidence and to enjoy the process of letting your mind range across it. In your seminars and classes, you will often be playing a sort of game of cards, where the cards are the items of evidence you are using. As you develop an idea or give a paper, you need to play those cards skilfully; you need to be aware of what counter-cards your colleagues might play in the course of the discussion; you need to be alert to the possibility that cards might be drawn from other decks. History is a serious subject, of course, but if it is to stay alive as a subject for us, you need to feel in control of it, and to have an awareness that your activities, serious as they are, are also a sort of game.

# Introduction

## History means more when it comes with a name

What is history? For some it is the story of Great Events and Significant People. For others, it is about the intersecting lives of people from all walks of life. Over the centuries, historians have tended to focus on long-term trends and important events. When they did turn their attention to individuals, they focused on the great men and (sometimes) women of the era. And for good reason: these are the events and figures that are best documented. More recently, however, scholars of the past have started asking different questions of the sources and assembling the evidence to explore the experiences of people more distant from the centers of power. This book draws from that tradition. Its goal is to craft a narrative of the lives of the men and women of one family of medieval lords: the Beaugencys.

The underlying premise of this study is that to truly understand the past, you have to focus on the lives of people. To invoke a well-worn cliché, you need to walk in their shoes – or perhaps more accurately for the subject of this book, their chainmail. To bring the medieval centuries to life, this book will center on the lives of a family of nobles who took their name from the castle of Beaugency and who resided there during the Central Middle Ages (c. 1000–1300 AD). Located in central France and nestled into a bend in the Loire River, Beaugency lays 90 miles almost due south of Paris (see Map 2 on page 000 at the start of this book). The Beaugency family, while noble, only rose as far to attain the rank of regional lord. They were never counts or kings or princes. Nor did they ever hold any office from the king. Nevertheless, their experiences can illuminate a notoriously challenging historical period to decipher. Like their peers, the lords of Beaugency controlled considerable properties and owed allegiance to some of the most powerful individuals in medieval France, including several counts. They were also the lords of other elites. They granted fiefs from their property to vassals who would owe them military service and loyalty, thus creating an extensive system of clientage. The Beaugencys also used marriage to extend their power and boost their social or political standing. Their political and family ties thus drew the Beaugencys into some of the headline events of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Beaugency family was also deeply enmeshed in the church. These men and women were generous ecclesiastical patrons,

supported reform of the church, participated in crusades and some joined the church as monks or nuns. As well as ties to the highest levels of medieval society, as lords the Beaugencys were also connected to the humblest members of society: the peasants, serfs and village dwellers who worked the extensive properties that this family controlled. Populating the villages and towns of the Beaugency domain were people who bought, sold and made goods for a living. As their lords, the Beaugency family influenced how these people lived their lives and, in turn, were affected by the life experiences of the peasants, tradesmen and merchants.

The Central Middle Ages were transformational centuries for medieval Europe. The Beaugency family is uniquely placed to explore these events, trends and developments, but also to understand how such transformations shaped the course of the lives of medieval people. Between 1000 and 1300 the population in Europe tripled. Related to this growth was economic transformation as the economy of Western Europe developed from subsistence into a commercial economy fueled by trade and coin (a transformation often referred to as the commercial revolution). Many opted to move to cities, which were centers of trade and flourishing as a result of commerce. Kings centralized their kingdoms and created peace, making it safe to travel – which helped to spur on long-distance trade. The church underwent a significant period of reform and erected spectacular cathedrals throughout Western Europe, often in urban areas. Crusaders “took the cross” and voyaged across oceans to “liberate” the Holy Land. Universities and law codes developed that would provide the foundations for their modern counterparts. In short, the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries saw profound changes that transformed Europe and planted the seeds of attributes that would come to characterize the modern period.

While we can list and describe these crucial events, can we really understand them without factoring the human experience? The Beaugency family will act as our entrée into these centuries. Through analysis of the lords and ladies of Beaugency, we are able to get a snapshot of what it was like to live as a mid-rank aristocrat in medieval France. Questions that need to be answered before proceeding are: Why this family? And why should we care about them? The answers are relatively simple. The lives of these men and women intersected with events such as royal centralization, the crusades, economic shifts, cultural revitalization and church reform. Understanding their individual experiences will provide a deeper appreciation of the impact of these larger, anonymous, events. Moreover, the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries saw profound changes that transformed Europe and put in place characteristics that would shape the modern period. These events, good and bad, were in large part directed by nobles just like the Beaugencys. Through charting of the ebb and flow of the lives of the Beaugency men and women, we can appreciate the complexities that made up the political, social, economic, religious and cultural landscape of the Central Middle Ages. This family was emblematic of an age.

The website, The Portal to the Past, has been developed to supplement this book with information about the people with whom the Beaugencys interacted, images of their physical and material environment, how they understood the world around them and where they traveled. Throughout the text various sections of this website have been signposted for readers to consult. Students will find guided reading questions under the “Tools” link of the Portal to the Past.

To reconstruct and recover past lives, historians of all periods and places are at the mercy of sources. Centuries of wars, rats, fires, neglect and general wear and tear have taken their toll on those from the Middle Ages. Furthermore, the great majority of documents created reflected or recorded the experiences of elites, secular and religious. What we are left with is only a small fraction of what was likely recorded or, in the case of material culture, existed. If we envision the history of the Middle Ages as an onion, with the skin of the onion representing all that happened in these centuries, all that we are left with is the tiny center core. Since history consists of many layers, how do we go about reconstructing the layers between the skin and the center of the onion?

Attempting to recover the lives of any medieval person is challenging, as the experiences of even the most prominent individuals were often undocumented. Even the most rudimentary information, such as dates of birth or death, often remains obscure and requires deductive reconstruction. Unlike modern historical figures who leave behind personal accounts, or who appear in a plethora of official documents, there are very few such sources for the medieval period, particularly before the thirteenth century. Because most medieval people, including the Beaugencys, did not leave behind accounts of their own lives, historians are dependent on what other people thought or recorded about them. The authors of these accounts are nearly always members of the clergy. As a consequence, much of what we know about medieval society in general, and the Beaugencys in particular, is filtered through this clerical lens. Fortunately, however, a handful of letters written by a lord and lady of Beaugency are extant.

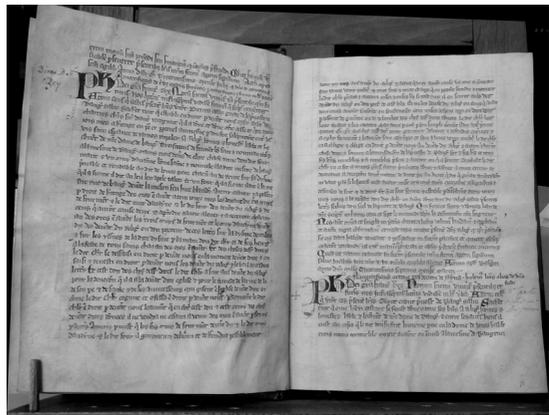
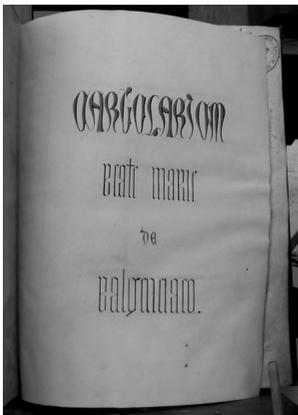
Medieval clerics and scribes penned all sorts of sources. As the literate professionals, they were often tasked by kings and lords to keep records. They noted the events of their time in chronicles and maintained extensive records of what property the church held. Clerics also produced “biographies” of noteworthy people such as kings and saints (often called hagiographies). But their emphasis on a saint’s sanctity or a king’s piety renders these sources more of a didactic treatise than a day-to-day account of individual lives. Members of the Beaugency family appear briefly in the chronicles and royal acts concerning justice or the distribution of property. Unfortunately these references tend to be terse and do not tell us what we often want to know – Why was Lord Ralph I at court? What did he think about the king? The queen? The bishop? The count? While they provide information on the political realm, they are less useful in weaving together the personal interactions.

## Introduction

Chronicle entries can be colorful, but may also be subject to exaggeration or bias since medieval chroniclers recorded events with a purpose or point in mind. For example, when Abbot Suger recounted the events of the life of King Louis VI, he tended to depict anyone who was a threat to the king's power as excessively violent or power-hungry. This does not mean the information extant in such documents is necessarily toxic. Rather, caution needs to be exercised before taking these accounts at face value.

Fortunately, the lords and ladies of Beaugency lived through a literary blossoming that spread throughout Europe. Much like moderns, medieval people loved to be entertained by stories. In the eleventh and early twelfth centuries the plot line of these stories revolved around war and the deeds of brave warriors. As the twelfth century unfolded, however, tastes changed. Literature came to focus on the personal dramas that spurred on a warrior's actions, such as his relationship with other knights, his king or his lady. While these romances and songs of deeds are rich in evocative details, they belong to the realm of the imagination. Literature, however, can be used to buttress and expand upon what documents of practice (or those sources concerned with the mundane aspects of life) record. Literary sources can also provide access into what medieval elites thought, felt and valued, for members of the aristocracy, including the Châtelain of Coucy who was a distant relative of the Beaugencys, did put quill to parchment to compose romances.

Providing the backbone for this study will be documents known as charters (several of which can be found in the Documents section of this book). Charters at their most basic are property deeds: They record the alienation of property from one person (or institution) to another. In most cases the recipient of the property was the church, which is why such documents survive.



Figures 0.1a and 0.1b Title page and charters of the Cartulary of Notre Dame de Beaugency. Archives départementales du Loiret, H 10, folios 1v and 2r. Author photos.

Single charters were often collected or copied into a cartulary. For example, the charters of Notre Dame of Beaugency were codified into a cartulary in the early fourteenth century (see Figures 0.1a and 0.1b)

Most of the acts recorded in the cartulary date before 1300, indicating that the scribe had access to the original charters which he then copied into the cartulary. Sometimes the original charter is extant, but sometimes the only charter we have is from a later cartulary. Cartulary copies raise certain questions about the information recorded. Specifically did the monk redact the document, meaning did he leave out information or recast events in a certain way? While it is difficult to tell sometimes, this is an issue that historians must consider in evaluating the information from these sources. For an example of a cartulary and discussion of its charters, as well as how manuscripts were produced in the Middle Ages, please see the Manuscript section on the Portal to the Past website.

Because charters record the mundane aspects of day-to-day living, reflecting more of real actions, they are considered “documents of practice.” The church kept careful records of the gifts made to them by pious donors. Each charter was written in a certain way and with standard information of who gave the property, to whom it was given, a description of the property, the consent of those who had a right or claim to the property and a list of witnesses to the transaction. But these documents can transcend the formulaic and provide nuggets of information useful to understanding life in the Middle Ages. Intriguingly, some charters record the emotional responses or motivations of the donors. One of the limitations of these sources is that they provide a frozen moment in time. What came before and what happened after the events recorded in the charter frequently go unaddressed in the document. Yet some individuals – like the members of the Beaugency family – appear in many charters during the course of their life. As a result, the charters make it possible to piece together who individuals married, how many children they had, where they lived, who their lords were, where they traveled, how they died and so on.

Material culture can prove useful for understanding the physical and natural environment in which a wide variety of medieval people lived. Remains of material culture, however, are by definition impersonal and anonymous. Although we cannot know that a certain article belonged to the lords and ladies of Beaugency, we can reasonably extrapolate that they may have possessed one like it. Surviving physical spaces can also help us to understand medieval life. The organization and decoration of space tells us much about the society that produced it – just as it does today. For example, the frescoes, stained-glass windows and sculpture extant from churches were not meant to be realistic but nevertheless provide insight into medieval attitudes toward the sacred and divine. Similarly, the layout of a castle out can reveal medieval notions of privacy or family life. The fields, ponds mills, ovens, wine presses and other features of the agricultural landscape are described in the documents and a surprisingly large number still survive. So, too, do medieval castles,

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parish churches and cathedrals. Although the dwellings of the humble have long since vanished, archeology has proved vital to rescuing the material culture of the peasants. Excavations have yielded enough information that peasant homes and communities can be reconstructed. Recent archeological research even provides insight into the diet and health of medieval people of all classes. To get a sense of the material environment of the Beaugencys' world, go to the Village of Beaugency and Environment sections of the Portal to the Past website.

The limitations of the sources thus pose a challenge in examining the lives of even a typical aristocratic family. When faced with a lack of sources sufficient to reconstruct one life, historians have developed an approach called *prosopography*, or *collective biography*. Instead of writing the biography of one individual, historians take bits of information about particular kinds of individuals – children, knights, merchants, women, the elderly – and put them together to create a mosaic of a life, or, put another way, a biography of a group. There are obvious limitations and flaws to this approach. Clearly not all life experiences were the same, but by being attentive to their sources and getting to know their subjects, historians are able to extrapolate the life experience of one from the experiences of the many. This methodology is far from perfect or foolproof, but it is one way to give voice to people in the past whose lives would otherwise remain silent.

What else can historians use to bring the past to life? Historical speculation and imagination can also be useful tools – if used judiciously. History, after all, is interpretation. Facts play a critical role in interpretation, but they are not the sum total of history. Rather history is the assemblage and interpretation of those facts. Historians literally immerse themselves in the sources of the past. This expertise allows them to make informed suppositions about how their subjects behaved, where they lived, what they felt. As long as their reconstructions and assertions are, as the noted historian Natalie Zemon Davis stated “held tightly in check by the voices of the past,” speculations, visualizations and informed hypothesizing are a legitimate means of adding flesh to the factual barebones of the past.<sup>1</sup> Not all interpretations are created equal, however. The very best are founded upon an intimate knowledge of the sources and do not go to places where their sources do not take them.

What is offered here is my interpretation of the Beaugencys' past and their world. As such it is informed by my authorial choices in interpreting the evidence, events and personalities, as well as how I interpret the larger trends that defined the Middle Ages. These interpretative choices are based upon my years of reading and analyzing hundreds of medieval documents, as well as my intimate knowledge of the Beaugency family, their physical environment, the medieval aristocracy and the general history of the Middle

1 Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) p. 5.

Ages. Others may read the documents with a different eye, influenced by their own context and understanding of the past and come up with a completely different interpretation. And they are welcome, indeed encouraged, to do so. At key points in the narrative, I will be intentional in explaining my interpretation of the evidence and in discussing the methodology or thinking behind it. “Doing” history is an active process, done in dialogue with other historians, to debate the evidence and develop interpretation. Such differences of interpretation and historiographical debates will also be signposted throughout the narrative. In order for you to determine if the following interpretation of medieval aristocratic life is “held tightly in check by the voices of the past,” translations of some of the documents used to inform the narrative can be found in the last section of the book (see page 000). Readers, moreover, should use these documents to develop their own interpretation of the lives of the Beaugency family.

This examination of medieval life will be organized into concentric, overlapping, circles. We will start at the widest point and move to the most immediate relationships in the lives of the Beaugencys and then move out once again to other circles of affinity. The book begins by considering the physical environment in which the Beaugencys lived. What did their world look like? Focus will then shift from a general description of the wider world to the people who were closest to them: Their family. The next section moves the discussion from the family back to the wider world. First, the political landscape of the world of the Beaugencys will be considered. Specifically, these chapters examine the relationship between the lords of Beaugency and the men and women to whom they owed allegiance – including the king – and those who owed allegiance to them. The lives of particular lords of Beaugency will be highlighted to provide a more intimate or individual glimpse into how large political forces shaped their experience. Next to follow will be discussion of those who were essential to the lives of the Beaugencys: The peasants. Individual relationships between the Beaugency family and their local peasantry will be explored to get an on-the-ground sense of how these two classes interacted. Another vitally important force in the lives of these men and women was religion. Discussion will begin with a general consideration of religion in the lives of the Beaugency family and their neighbors. Focus will then move inside the walls of the monastery to consider the life of the medieval clergy by examining the experiences of a local abbess and one of the Beaugencys’ distant kinsmen who was the abbot of a local monastery. Underlying the discussion of the lives of the Beaugencys will be forces – economic, political, familial and cultural – that shaped their world and ultimately resulted in changing their reality to the point that a new era began.

So what did the world of the Beaugencys look like? Where did they live? What would they have encountered as they traversed the countryside? Let us now begin our exploration of the world of the Beaugencys.

## Suggested reading

For a general overview of how the discipline of history has evolved, see Norman J. Wilson, *History in Crisis? Recent Directions in Historiography*, 3rd edition, New York: Pearson Education, 2013; John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History*, 6th edition, London: Routledge, 2015; and Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001. Although different in approach, each offers an easily accessible analysis of historiography, the challenges that historians face and how they historians have reconstructed the past.

Primary sources are the lifeblood of studying the past. Joel Rosenthal offers an excellent analysis of the various genres of medieval sources, their particular strengths and challenges: Joel T. Rosenthal, *Understanding Medieval Primary Sources: Using Historical Sources to Discover Medieval Europe*, London: Routledge, 2011.

This study of the Beaugency family is a microhistory of the Central Middle Ages. Microhistories can be fascinating ways of learning about the past. There is none better than *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983, by Natalie Zemon Davis. Her methodology for telling the story of Martin Guerre generated considerable discussion and debate at the time of its publication and continues to do so. See the forum on this book in the *American Historical Review*, 93 (June 1988): 553–603. More recently, Steven Bednarski offers a compelling analysis of the life of the trials of a medieval peasant woman in, *A Poisoned Past: The Life and Times of Margarida de Portu, A Fourteenth-Century Accused Poisoner*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. He also welcomes the reader into the authorial choices he made in crafting his analysis of Margarida's life.

## CHAPTER 6

# Filling the Vacuum of Power, 950–1100

In 950, three cities claimed to be the seat of the legitimate caliphate. The next century and a half proved that each claim merely demonstrated that the Muslim world was hopelessly divided, both religiously and politically. The inherent weakness of each polity, and the emerging social strains in each region, rendered their claims ephemeral. Their petty concerns and evident weakness encouraged other ambitious leaders to make bids for power, with the result that the period witnessed frequent clashes.

The year 1100 is a convenient one with which to close the period. In the east, the Buyids fell in 1055 to a group of invaders called the Saljuq Turks. The Turks' entry into the heartland of the Muslim world heralded the arrival of a dynamic ethnic group that would dominate large parts of the Dar al-Islam for centuries to come. A dynastic struggle for power within their ranks in the 1090s, however, left the Mediterranean coastline vulnerable to the invasion of the Frankish Crusaders at the close of the decade. In North Africa, the Fatimid Empire became the greatest of the Muslim powers in the eleventh century, but it suffered a debilitating schism in 1094, also just before the Crusaders showed up to seize Palestine from it. In the west, the Reconquista claimed its first major triumph in 1085 by taking Toledo, but a new Berber dynasty known as the Almoravids immediately came across the Strait of Gibraltar from North Africa to prevent any more of Andalus from falling under Christian control. By 1100, the Almoravids had incorporated most of Andalus into their North African empire.

### **The Buyid Sultanate**

In Baghdad, one of the first orders of business for the Buyids when they seized power in 945 was the regularization of pay for the military. They inherited from the

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Abbasid regime a practice that had begun as early as the ninth century of substituting “tax farms” for the salaries due to officers. Because tax collection was so inefficient, the government was often short of cash to pay military officers and high civilian officials. The new technique entailed granting to officials the right to collect the taxes themselves from specific villages or districts. The system under the Abbasids had had only limited success due to its intermittent practice and the fact that the officers in charge of the revenue of a district sometimes would not forward to the government the amount in excess due to the officer himself. The Buyids codified the practice, guaranteeing officers that if their assignment was inadequate, another would be exchanged for it. They also implemented audits that secured the amount due the government. The grant of a tax district is known as an *iqta'*, and it proved to have a long life in Southwest Asia. Its theoretical appeal to government officials is understandable, but in practice it proved detrimental to the economic productivity of the areas in which it operated. The officer in charge of local revenues was often tempted to extract more taxes than were due him whenever he saw any accumulated wealth. As a result, peasants and merchants soon learned that they had no incentive to improve their farms or businesses.

The early Buyids wore their Zaydi convictions lightly, and they quickly became devoted Twelver Shi'ites. On the one hand, they did not force their sectarian identity on their subjects, and they never threatened the Sunni caliph. On the other hand, they did protect and encourage the practice of Shi'ism, which had been crystallizing in Iraq even before the Buyids assumed power there. Hasan al-'Askari, the eleventh Imam of Twelver Shi'ism, was in Samarra when he died in 874, and the scholars who began developing the idea of the Hidden Imam in the 940s were centered in Baghdad. During the 960s, the Buyid regime in Baghdad inaugurated two ceremonies that became central to the ritual life of subsequent Twelver Shi'ism. One was Ashura, which memorializes the death of Husayn at Karbala. *'Ashura'* literally means “tenth,” referring to the tenth day of the month of Muharram, when Husayn was killed. Over the next several centuries, the observance of the martyrdom eventually developed into an elaborate ten-day observance involving prayer, Qur'anic recitations, reenactments of the battle at Karbala, and, in some localities, self-flagellation by the pious as a way to share in Husayn's suffering.

The other festival that Shi'ites began to observe at this time was Ghadir Khumm, the celebration of Muhammad's designation of 'Ali to be his rightful successor. The fundamental assumption of pro-Alids all along had been that 'Ali and his family were the most qualified to rule. The early Shi'ites claimed that the Prophet had designated 'Ali to be his successor at the pool (*ghadir*) of Khumm. Now, under a Shi'ite regime, that tradition could be publicly celebrated. When the celebrations were held, however, clashes between Sunnis and Shi'ites were common.

Throughout the period of Buyid rule, Baghdad lagged behind both Rayy and Shiraz economically and politically. Shiraz was the wealthiest city of the Buyid confederation, and Rayy became a thriving commercial center on the east–west caravan route. Baghdad did house the caliph, its physical size was still impressive, and scholarly life continued, but it was in the grip of perpetual economic and political crises. Daylami and Turkic soldiers frequently fought pitched battles in the streets, and the countryside was plagued with banditry.

In addition, the tenth and eleventh centuries witnessed a reassertion of nomads throughout the Fertile Crescent and western Iran. The Umayyads and early Abbasids had controlled the movements of nomads by means of a policy that combined the incentive of subsidies and the threat of force. The bedouin lost their subsidies by the ninth century and were displaced from the Abbasid army by the tenth century. In order to compensate for their economic losses, they began raiding settlements in Syria and Iraq. They discovered that the decline of central authority and of economic stability enabled them to engage in attacks almost with impunity. Several local Arab and Kurdish families seized control of cities during this period and created short-lived dynasties. By the end of the tenth century, competing Arab and Kurdish families ruled northern Iraq, northern Syria, the middle Euphrates valley, and eastern Anatolia. The most famous of the new ruling groups was the Shi'ite Hamdanid confederation, which controlled Mosul and Aleppo for most of the tenth century. The Hamdanids actually controlled a larger area than did the caliph or his Buyid "Commander of Commanders." They demonstrated their wealth and sophistication by patronizing famous artists and scholars. The Hamdanid ruler of Aleppo, for example, became the primary patron of the philosopher al-Farabi.

Compounding the disorder caused by the "bedouinization" of Syria and Iraq during this period was a century-long revival of Byzantine military power. The Byzantines began capturing Arab settlements in eastern Anatolia in the 930s, driving out the population. In the 960s, they retook Crete, captured Antioch and Tarsus, and sacked Aleppo. Aleppo was subjected to nine days of pillaging, and 10,000 Muslim children were said to have been dragged into captivity. Although the Hamdanids subsequently regained their position as rulers of Aleppo, they served thereafter at the sufferance of the Byzantines and had to pay tribute to them.

Under pressure from the street preachers and ulama, the Buyid regime in Baghdad attempted to mobilize against the Byzantine threat in the early 970s. Factions within the Turkic units of the Buyid army seized this chance to rebel against their masters, however, leading to a civil war that lasted from 972 to 975 and devastated Baghdad. The instability in Baghdad allowed the Byzantines to eliminate vast expanses of Muslim settlement in the frontier zone along the Taurus Mountains. Refugees flooded into Syria and northern Iraq, causing the Buyids and the caliphate to lose considerable prestige for their failure to stem the tide of the Christian army's incursions.

A resurgent Byzantine empire was ominous for the Buyids, but the security problem was intensified by the rise of yet another threat, this time from the east. After 1030, isolated groups of Turkic sheep herders and war bands began to filter into Azerbaijan and northern Iraq from Transoxiana. Themselves the victims of warfare in the east, they were desperately poor, seeking green grass for their sheep and plunder for themselves. Their arrival touched off chronic warfare between them and the local inhabitants. One group of these herdsmen temporarily captured Mosul in 1044. Challenged from the east and from the west, the authority of the Buyids by the middle of the eleventh century extended little farther than the environs of their three main cities. Even in the cities the sight was not pretty. Travelers reported that Baghdad had degenerated into a congeries of fortified hamlets, separated from each other by the desolate ruins of what once had been the greatest city in the world west of China.

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**FIGURE 6.1** The Samanid dynastic tomb in Bukhara, tenth century. The Samanids were known for their fine decorative brickwork, and the tomb exhibits their skill on both the exterior and interior walls.

Melvyn Longhurst / Alamy Stock Photo.

### The Advent of the Turks

By the middle of the eleventh century, the Buyids were suffering from a series of escalating challenges from the Byzantines, bedouin, and Turks. A clear-headed military analyst in Baghdad in the early eleventh century would have emphasized the need to concentrate Buyid military resources against the Byzantines and bedouin. They were, after all, formidable local threats. The Turks, fearsome as they might be, were based a thousand miles away in Transoxiana. Such a clear-headed analysis would have been wrong, as even rational calculation sometimes can be in the face of the unexpected. As it turned out, the Turks dispensed with the Buyids, Byzantines, and bedouin as though they were leaves before the wind. The coming of the Turks into Southwest Asia in the mid-eleventh century heralded a profound transformation in the relations of power in the Dar al-Islam.

The Turks were a new addition to the linguistic quilt of the Umma. Whereas Arabic is part of the Semitic language family and Persian is one of the Indo-European languages, the Turkic languages are part of the Ural–Altaic language group, which includes the languages of the Mongols and Koreans. Like the Arabs before them, the Turks quickly conquered a vast, sedentary, and urban-based society. Unlike the Arabs, whose language and religion transformed the civilization of the conquered areas, the Turks were quick to appropriate the languages and religion of the societies into which they moved. But even though they recognized that the culture of the new

areas was superior to theirs, they had a sense that they were destined to be rulers over wide areas of the earth. Politically and militarily, they would prove to be the dominant ethnic group within the Umma for most of the next nine centuries.

For as long as we have historical evidence, there have been several Turkic groups. Today these include the Turks of Turkey as well as the Azeris, Turkmen, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and others. There are about forty recognized Turkic languages. Today, ethnologists like to reserve the term *Turkish* for the language and culture of the Turks of Turkey, whereas the term *Turkic* can apply to all those who speak a related language. The Turkic peoples enjoy varying degrees of mutual intelligibility, similar to ranges of intelligibility among speakers of Romance languages or Slavic languages. In this book, *Turkish* will be used for the Oghuz group who settled Anatolia and southeastern Europe, and *Turkic* will be used for other related groups or Turks in general.

### Origins

Between the seventh and eleventh centuries, most Turks lived in the area north of the Syr Darya River and the Aral Sea. They were divided into some two dozen competing confederations. A few Turkic groups—among them the Bulgars, Khazars, Cumans (the western Qipchaqs), and Pechenegs—made their way westward early in this period and played an important role in the early medieval history of Eastern Europe. Others, notably the Qarluqs, Oghuz, and eastern Qipchaqs, remained in the area north of Transoxiana.

From the early ninth century, Turks had interacted with the Dar al-Islam in different ways. Individual Turks entered the region as adventurers, slaves, mercenary soldiers, and merchants. The Samanid amirate (819–999), with its capital in Bukhara, was the Muslim principality that had the most contact with Turkic peoples. Even though it was a self-consciously Persian regime, its military force was composed largely of Turkic mamluks. Furthermore, although the economic base of the Samanid regime was the irrigated agriculture of Transoxiana, a large part of its wealth derived from the commerce of the slave trade in Turks, for the states of Southwest Asia had by the tenth century developed an insatiable appetite for slave soldiers.

In 961, one of the Samanid ruler's Turkic mamluks seized from his master the city of Ghazna (modern Ghazni) in what is now Afghanistan, where he proceeded to build a power base. In 994, his successor cooperated with the Samanid ruler of the time to repel an invading force of Turks from the Qarluq confederation, and as a reward he received control of Khorasan. Thus, by the end of the tenth century, Ghazna (its ruling dynasty has come to be known as the Ghaznavids) had virtually independent control of the territories south of the Amu Darya. This empire was inherited by Mahmud of Ghazna (998–1030), who became famous for his wide-ranging military campaigns. He made at least seventeen major raids into India for treasure, striking as far south as Gujarat, plundering and destroying Hindu temples. The most successful—and infamous—of his conquests was the plundering of the immense temple complex of Somnath in 1025–1026, which resulted in the massacre of thousands of Hindus and the extraction of incalculable wealth. Mahmud boasted of how his troops smashed to pieces the golden idols there; he did not emphasize that the gold was then carried back to the treasury at Ghazna for him to enjoy.

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The emergence of the Ghaznavid state had long-lasting repercussions. As an aggressive Muslim regime in what are today Afghanistan and eastern Iran, it was poised to be a base for the future expansion of Islam into South Asia, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. Culturally, it was equally influential. Mahmud's capital at Ghazna is obscure to most of us today, but prior to the thirteenth century it ranked among the three or four most culturally advanced cities in the entire Dar al-Islam. It attracted not only Turkic warriors but also many scholars and literary figures who were conversant in both Persian and Arabic culture.

The Ghaznavids were Persianized Turks. Although members of the ruling elite were ethnic Turks, they continued the patronage of Persian art and literature that the Samanids had begun in Transoxiana decades earlier. The greatest literary work of the era was the *Shah-nameh*, or *Book of Kings*. This monumental epic of some 60,000 verses is an intriguing example of the Persian revival of the period. While it is not anti-Islamic, it is a celebration of pre-Islamic Iran and can be read as an implicit criticism of the Arab conquest of Iran. Its author, Ferdowsi, is said to have worked on the poem for thirty years. For most of that period he lived under Samanid rule, but he presented the manuscript to Mahmud in 1010.

Mahmud also commissioned several outstanding architectural works which had a long-lasting influence. Iranian mosques were already beginning to incorporate into their design a Sasanian feature, the *eyvan*, or large vaulted hall closed on three sides and open to a court on the fourth. Several large mosques of this type were constructed in Ghazna. The motif of a court surrounded by four eyvans came to dominate Turkic monumental architecture in Iran and Central Asia for centuries to come.

Mahmud's large army, augmented by armor-plated war elephants, struck terror into the hearts of all his opponents. Although his raids may appear to the observer to have been largely in quest of loot, Mahmud insisted that he was championing the cause of Sunnism against both paganism and Shi'ism. He gained a reputation in the Muslim heartland as a champion of Sunni Islam, and although he was a brutal and exploitative ruler, scholars praised him for his patronage of the arts and sciences. Sunnis who chafed under Buyid rule looked to him as their potential deliverer. To their delight, he turned his armies westward late in his career. He captured Ray from the Buyids in 1029 and harassed Buyid holdings in Kirman and Fars. At his death in 1030, he controlled an empire that extended from the border of Azerbaijan to the upper Ganges and from the Amu Darya to the Indian Ocean.

## The Birth of Rostam

*Speakers of Persian still revere Ferdowsi's Shah-nameh, and many of them know by heart large numbers of its verses. The figure from the poem who remains the most popular with Iranians is Rostam, a great hero who fought continually for the defense of Iran. The selection that follows relates details from the circumstances surrounding his birth and provides a flavor of the tone and style of the poem, even though the translation is in prose.*

## Filling the Vacuum of Power, 950–1100

*The incident requires some background: The great ruler Sam had abandoned his infant son Zal at birth because the baby's hair was entirely white. The child was placed on the top of a remote mountain to die, but a great bird, the Simorgh, brought Zal to her nest and raised him as her own. Eventually, Sam learned that Zal had survived to become a towering figure himself and came for him. As Zal was leaving the mountain with his father, the Simorgh gave him one of her feathers and told him that, should he ever encounter trouble, he should burn the feather, and she would come to his aid. Zal soon met the beautiful princess Rudaba, and, as the poem relates, their love grew, and wisdom fled: She was soon pregnant with their son, Rostam. The pregnancy, however, was difficult, and Zal was afraid that Rudaba would die. Remembering the feather, he burned it, and the Simorgh instantly appeared.*

The Simorgh inquired, "What means this grief? Why these tears in the lion's eyes? From this silver-bosomed cypress, whose face is as the moon for loveliness, a child will issue for you who will be eager for fame. Lions will kiss the dust of his footsteps and above his head even the clouds will find no passage. Merely at the sound of his voice the hide of the fighting leopard will burst and it will seize its claws in its teeth for panic. For judgment and sagacity he will be another Sam in all his gravity, but when stirred to anger he will be an aggressive lion. He will have the slender grace of a cypress but the strength of an elephant; with one of his fingers he will be able to cast a brick two leagues.

"Yet, by command of the Lawgiver, Provider of all good, the child will not come into existence by the ordinary way of birth. Bring me a poniard of tempered steel and a man of percipient heart versed in incantation. Let the girl be given a drug to stupefy her and to dull any fear or anxiety in her mind; then keep guard while the clairvoyant recites his incantations and so watch until the lion-boy leaves the vessel which contains him. The wizard will pierce the frame of the young woman without her awareness of any pain and will draw the lion-child out of her, covering her flank with blood, and will sew together the part he has cut. Therefore banish all fear, care and anxiety from your heart. There is an herb which I will describe to you. Pound it together with milk and musk and place it in a dry shady place. Afterwards spread it over the wound and you will perceive at once how she has been delivered from peril. Over it all then pass one of my feathers and the shadow of my royal potency will have achieved a happy result."

Speaking thus she plucked a feather from her wing, cast it down and flew aloft.

*(Zal took the feather and obeyed his instructions. When his son was born, he named him Rostam.)*

Ten foster-mothers gave Rostam the milk, which provides men with strength and then, when after being weaned from milk he came to eating substantial food, they gave him an abundance of bread and flesh. Five men's portions were his provision and it was a wearisome task to prepare it for him. He grew to the height of eight men so that his stature was that of a noble cypress; so high did he grow that it was as though he might become a shining star at which all the world would gaze. As he stood you might have believed him to be the hero Sam for handsomeness and wisdom, for grace and judgment.

*SOURCE: The Epic of the Kings: Shah-Nama the national epic of Persia. Translated by Reuben Levy. (1967) 47–48.*

## Civilization vs. Chaos, 950–1260

While the Ghaznavids were securing their power in Afghanistan during the second half of the tenth century, clans from two of the Turkic confederations—the Qarluq and Oghuz—began crossing the Syr Darya into Transoxiana. The Qarluq group, led by the Qara-khanid dynasty, converted en masse to Islam about 960. In 992, the Qara-khanids seized Bukhara from the Samanids, and seven years later they took Samarqand. The Amu Darya served as the boundary between the Qara-khanids and their rivals, the Ghaznavids.

Like the Ghaznavids, the Qara-khanids ruled over a largely Persian-speaking populace at first, but Transoxiana experienced a continual in-migration of Turks. Again, like the Ghaznavids, they patronized literature, but in this case, it was a new Turkic literature based on Arabic and Persian models, with the result that Turkic speakers had access to a wide range of Islamic literature. Qara-khanid unity soon splintered into several rival petty states, but the rulers of these chiefdoms signaled their transition from a nomadic lifestyle to an urban environment with their financial support for hospitals, mosques, schools, and caravanserais in Transoxiana.

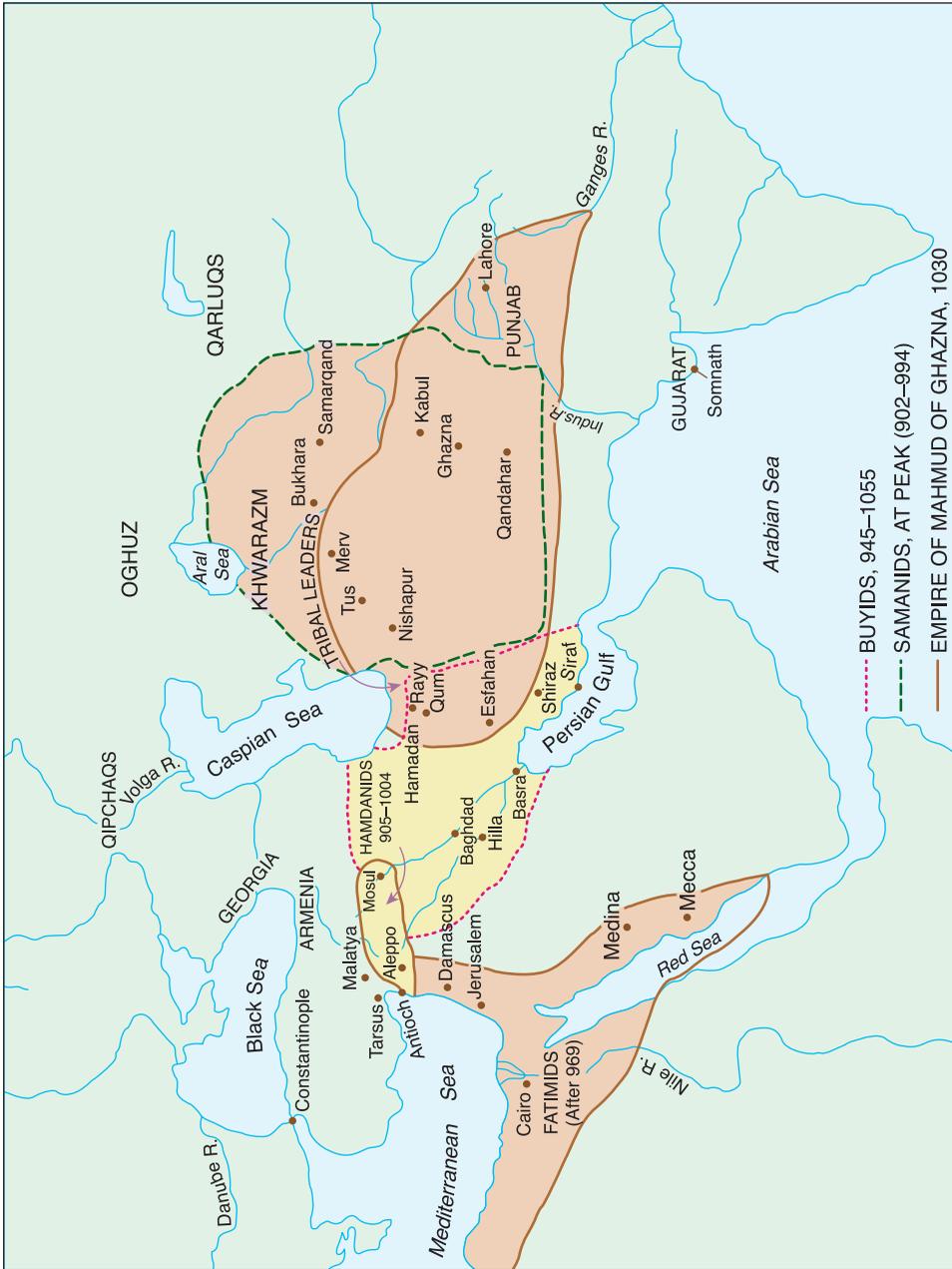
### The Saljuq Invasion

Not long after the Qarluqs entered Transoxiana, the Oghuz followed. The most famous of the Oghuz clans is that of the Saljuqs. They left the region north of the Aral Sea and entered Transoxiana in the 980s, when the Samanids requested their assistance against other Turkic invaders. Still more migrated into the area in the early eleventh century when various branches of the Qara-khanids sought outside aid in their own civil war. Thus, the Saljuqs came into Transoxiana by invitation. It is not known if they had converted to Islam before they entered Transoxiana or after, but, like the Qarluqs, they converted collectively—the religion of the leader became the religion of the tribe.

In 1035, a drought in Transoxiana forced a band of Saljuqs, led by the brothers Chaghri and Tughril, across the Amu Darya into Khorasan in search of grazing land for their sheep. Khorasan was still part of the Ghaznavid domain, but Mahmud's son Mas'ud had succeeded him as ruler at the former's death in 1030. Mas'ud had no sympathy for the Saljuqs' plight and treated them harshly. The Saljuqs struck back and defeated him. Mas'ud then granted them a small territory for grazing purposes, but their victories had emboldened them, and they were no longer willing to act as supplicants. They allowed their sheep to graze unrestricted in the oases of the northern Khorasan, with the result that crops were damaged. They also intercepted caravans and harassed the villages and towns of the region.

The inhabitants of the major cities of Merv and Nishapur had already been chafing under the heavy taxation of the Ghaznavids, and now their discontent increased as it appeared that Mas'ud was not going to deliver them from the uncouth and dangerous nomads who did what they pleased. Despairing of any help from the government in Ghazna, Merv surrendered to the Saljuqs in 1037, followed the next year by Nishapur. In 1040, Mas'ud finally attacked the Saljuqs, only to be soundly defeated. The Ghaznavid Empire lost Khorasan forever and was thereafter centered on Ghazna and Lahore.

As the new rulers of Khorasan, the Saljuqs were in a position to carve out a large empire. They conquered Khwarazm on the lower Amu Darya, in 1042. The Saljuq leaders found much to admire in the Persian culture that permeated the new areas



MAP 6.1 The Eastern Muslim World, 950-1030.

## Civilization vs. Chaos, 950–1260

they ruled. Although they and their successors always remained proud of being Turks, they began to adopt certain features of the new culture for their own purposes. They saw the advantages of an efficient bureaucracy with a tax-gathering mechanism, and they admired the Persian literary tradition and architectural styles. They began recruiting Khorasani bureaucrats, the most talented of whom was Nizam al-Mulk, whose achievements we shall examine later. They also began to incorporate into their army a unit of slave soldiers. Within two decades or so, mamluks would constitute the core of the Saljuq army, although the majority of the troops at that time were still free Turks, often accompanied by their families and herds.

Soon after the conquest of Khwarazm, Tughril and Chaghri agreed on a division of labor. Leaving Chaghri in charge of Khorasan, Tughril began a campaign of conquest westward across Iran. He captured Rayy in 1043, and over the next seven years he also captured Hamadan and Esfahan. He discovered that he had to rely increasingly on his mamluks and less on his nomadic Turks. Typically fractious and independent, these Turks' priority was the acquisition of loot and good grazing grounds for their herds. Tughril knew that he could not discipline them sufficiently to control their looting, but he did try to channel their looting into regions outside the provinces for which he had taken responsibility to protect. As a result, bands of Turks not directly under Tughril's control raided into Armenia, eastern Anatolia, and northern Iraq. As long as they were not causing havoc in the areas in which Tughril wanted his authority recognized, they served a useful purpose in weakening the administrative authority of potential enemies.

From Esfahan, Tughril began negotiating for the surrender of Shiraz and Baghdad by their Buyid rulers. Baghdad, characteristically, was riven at the time by sectarian strife between Sunnis and Shi'ites, bedouin depredations, and schisms within its own army. Now it faced the Saljuq army. The faction aligned with the caliph invited Tughril to take over the city from its Buyid overlords. In December 1055, he did so, with little effort. Soon, however, he faced two serious challenges. The first was a revolt by one of his brothers, who managed to secure a large following by charging Tughril with having lost his authentic Turkish identity by associating too closely with urban Arab and Iranian elites.

The second challenge was a threat from a Shi'ite conspiracy. By the 1050s, Fatimid missionaries had achieved considerable success in Iraq, as villagers and townspeople sought an alternative to their unbearable conditions. Fatimid agents pointed to the deteriorating conditions as evidence that the time was ripe for God to deliver the Iraqi people through the agency of his Imam. When Tughril took over the capital in 1055, many Iraqis were suspicious and even contemptuous of the Saljuq leader, whom they regarded as dangerous and uncivilized. Among the group that opposed Tughril was a Turkish mamluk officer in Buyid service called al-Basasiri. Al-Basasiri had become one of the most powerful members of Baghdad's military establishment. As such, he was determined not to become subject to what he regarded as a bunch of sheep herders. He consulted with a Fatimid missionary as he planned to recapture Baghdad, only this time in the name of al-Mustansir, the Fatimid caliph-Imam.

Taking advantage of Tughril's absence when the Saljuq leader had to subdue the revolt by his brother, al-Basasiri inflicted a major defeat on the Saljuq army in 1057 and entered Baghdad in triumph the following year. He handed the Abbasid caliph over to Arab tribesmen for safekeeping, instituted the Shi'ite form of the call

to prayer, and said the sermon in the name of al-Mustansir. Thus, for almost a year, Baghdad formally acknowledged the authority of the Fatimid caliph. For purposes that are now obscure, the Fatimid wazir abruptly cut off aid to al-Basasiri. Tughril, having crushed his brother's revolt, turned back to Baghdad. Upon defeating al-Basasiri, he carried out an intense persecution of Iraqi Shi'ites, both Twelver and Isma'ili. The attempted Shi'ite coup d'état left the Saljuq regime permanently hostile to any form of Shi'ism.

Tughril's recapture of Baghdad was a momentous occasion. For many Sunnis who had become concerned about the political dominance of Shi'ism in Iraq, Egypt, and scattered provincial dynasties, it was a ray of hope that the caliph's authority would be restored. In fact, although the Sunni Saljuqs respected the caliph as the Shi'ite Buyids could not, they had no intention of turning political or military control over to him. On the other hand, by destroying the Buyids, challenging the Fatimids, and in general persecuting Shi'ites, the Saljuq administration did play a major role in the consolidation of Sunni dominance over Shi'ism in most of Southwest Asia during the next century.

Tughril's consolidation of power was also a dramatic expansion of a process that had been underway since the beginning of the century: the growing importance of Turkic political and cultural power in the Muslim world. Many of the urban sophisticates of the era were contemptuous of Tughril's achievement, viewing it as an ephemeral power grab by a mob of unruly nomads. In fact, however, his arrival marked the advent in Southwest Asia of Turks as creators of empires rather than as mere soldiers. As empire builders, they would create some of the most powerful states in the world during the next several hundred years, controlling territory from the middle Danube in Europe to the mouth of the Ganges in South Asia.

### The Great Saljuqs and the Saljuqs of Rum

With the recapture of Baghdad in 1058, Tughril secured control of Iraq and western Iran. A year or two later, his brother Chaghri died in Khorasan and was succeeded by his son Alp-Arslan. Then, when Tughril died in 1063, a council of elders chose Alp-Arslan to inherit the entire empire, from Iraq to Khorasan. Although Baghdad remained important as the seat of the Abbasid caliphate, and hence of the legitimacy of Saljuq rule, Esfahan became the seat of most of the Saljuq bureaucratic apparatus. Alp-Arslan left most matters of civil administration to Nizam al-Mulk, his Khorasani *vizier* (the transliteration for the Turkish pronunciation of *wazir*).

Alp-Arslan spent little time in Esfahan, for he was a tireless military campaigner. He secured regions that had been bypassed during the original campaign, disciplined renegade followers, and conducted campaigns in Armenia and Georgia designed to secure his borders against Byzantine threats. He also had to suppress a major revolt by one of Tughril's cousins, Qutlumish, who challenged Alp-Arslan's right to rule the entire empire. Alp-Arslan's rapid rise to power had created a crisis. He had not acted illegitimately, but the Saljuqs had no regularized process of succession to power. Like their fellow Turks, they followed a tradition that every member of the ruling dynasty had an inherent right to rule. Influential elders could agree on a successor to the dead ruler, but any member of the family could legitimately challenge the selection. The advantage of the system was that it prevented the accumulation of power in a

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**FIGURE 6.2** The *Shah-nameh* was popular everywhere that Persian culture became influential, including the Indian subcontinent. Here, in a fourteenth-century painting from India, Rostam is shown killing the White Dragon.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA Denman Waldo Ross Collection / Bridgeman Images.

single lineage. The disadvantage was that most Turkic domains were frequently embroiled in struggles for leadership.

The Byzantine Empire, for which the Saljuqs borrowed the Arabic name *Rum* (for Rome, pronounced “room”), now came under unrelenting Turkish pressure. The reason for this did not lie in policies of state: Alp-Arslan was not interested in conquering the Byzantine Empire. In the wake of the Saljuq conquests, however, a constant stream of Turks flowed into western Iran, northern Iraq, and Azerbaijan. With their families and herds in tow, they renewed the raiding of Azerbaijan and Byzantine Armenia and began extending their forays even into central Anatolia and northern Syria. Rarely were these raids authorized by Alp-Arslan. Many of the participants were even his enemies, including the sons of Qutlumish, who formed a cohesive group of raiders that grew steadily more powerful.

Nevertheless, the raids were rationalized as attacks on the infidel, in accordance with a long tradition of warfare on the frontiers of the Dar al-Islam. From the perspective

of the Turks, Rum was a territory in which towns and villages could be looted, the dominance of Muslims could be asserted, and refuge could be sought from the hands of a central Saljuq authority that was becoming progressively alienated from its nomadic masses. From the perspective of Alp-Arslan himself, the more unruly nomads who could be diverted into Rum, the fewer problems he had to worry about as he began laying the foundation for a powerful state. Thus began a tradition of Turkish *gazis*, or raiders, who harassed non-Muslim territories on the Muslim Turkish frontier.

The Byzantine authorities became increasingly concerned about the rising scale of the raids, particularly when one campaign took raiders to the heart of Anatolia at Iconium (Konya). Negotiations between the emperor and the sultan took place sporadically, but Alp-Arslan had nothing to gain from antagonizing thousands of Turks by limiting their raiding. The Byzantines suspected that he was secretly encouraging the raids, and when, in 1071, he embarked on a military campaign to capture Syria, the leaders in Constantinople decided to take advantage of his absence by attacking Azerbaijan. The sultan, who had advanced to Aleppo, had to turn back to protect his empire. He met the Byzantine army at Manzikert (Malazgirt), near Lake Van.

The Byzantine emperor, Romanus IV Diogenes, had assembled almost the entire Byzantine army to confront the sultan, but the bulk of his forces now consisted of foreign mercenaries, including the Norsemen of the Varangian Guard, Normans and Franks from Western Europe, Slavs, and even Turks, including some from the Oghuz group itself. The various units were feuding among themselves, and key commanders even of the Greek units despised their emperor. The result was that up to one-half of the army deserted on the eve of the battle, and the Saljuqs obliterated the proud imperial military force. The Battle of Manzikert, remembered thereafter by the Byzantines as “that terrible day,” ranks as one of history’s most decisive battles. The units of the vaunted Byzantine army either were destroyed in the battle or melted away into fragmentary and ineffective components.

Rum now lay open to invasion, utterly undefended. Conquest of the area was the last thing on the mind of Alp-Arslan himself: Confronted with a threat by the Qara-khanids on his Amu Darya frontier, he launched a campaign to invade Transoxiana. Turks on the Anatolian frontier, however, *were* interested in Anatolia, and now they encountered no effective resistance to their encroachments into Rum. Once in the area, they had no reason to leave after raiding. More and more of them entered the peninsula in search of grazing areas and raiding opportunities. Some Turks even entered by invitation from Byzantine factions competing for power in the aftermath of Manzikert. In 1078, the new emperor was struggling to cling to power against nobles who coveted the throne for themselves. He requested military aid from the Saljuq group led by the sons of Qutlumish. When they succeeded in securing his power, he then enlisted them to defeat a European rival. In return for their invaluable services, he gave them access to the city of Nicaea (modern Iznik), sixty miles from Constantinople. The Saljuqs turned it into the capital city of what came to be known as the Sultanate of Rum. Thus, in a remarkable irony, the Byzantines themselves encouraged Turkish immigration into central and western Anatolia, even providing the Saljuqs with cities to use as their bases. It would be several centuries before Turks constituted the majority of the population of Anatolia. But with their rapid dominance of its cities, it is little wonder that, in little over a century, the Franks of the Third Crusade would be calling the area Turkey.

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Alp-Arslan met an untimely end during his campaign in Transoxiana. A prisoner was brought to his tent, and somehow the man was able to stab the sultan, mortally wounding him. The sultan was succeeded by his teenage son, Malik-Shah (1073–1092), for whom Nizam al-Mulk continued to serve as vizier. Like Alp-Arslan and Tughril, Malik-Shah was an able military leader. Early in his career, he suppressed revolts by relatives who challenged his leadership, and he repulsed a Qara-khanid attack. Thereafter, however, he combined diplomacy and intrigue with his military skills. He expanded Saljuq power into parts of Qara-khanid territory in Transoxiana, captured most of Syria and Palestine from the Fatimids; and occupied parts of Yemen and the Persian Gulf. The army that brought him victories and made his diplomacy effective continued to evolve. Alp-Arslan had increased the number of slave soldiers in it, and at the height of Malik-Shah's career, the nucleus of his army was slave. Almost all the rest were now mercenaries rather than nomadic Turks.

The composition of the army was only one example of the assimilation of the Saljuq elite into the Perso-Islamic culture of the period. Malik-Shah's name is another. Whereas Tughril and Alp-Arslan are Turkish names, the name Malik-Shah derives from the new environment: *Malik* is the Arabic word for "king," and *shah* is Persian for "emperor." The young ruler was a patron of literature, science, and art, and he ordered the construction of beautiful buildings in his capital at Esfahan. Nizam al-Mulk, the native Iranian vizier, worked hard to impose traditional Iranian administrative practices within the Saljuq court and partially succeeded. He, too, was instrumental in providing patronage for great works of architecture and in establishing colleges of higher learning in Iraq and Syria that emulated similar institutions in his home of Khorasan.

Malik-Shah died in 1092, and with him died the unity of his empire. The open-ended Turkic policy of succession now created a crisis. Contrary to Nizam al-Mulk's conviction that an autocratic regime was the highest expression of good government, the Saljuq state had continued to be administered in a decentralized fashion in deference to the traditional Turkic conception that the family as a whole should participate in the wielding of power. The provinces were granted a considerable amount of autonomy under the leadership of close relatives of the sultan. When Malik-Shah died, the family could not agree on his successor, and various princes fought each other with the armies at their disposal. For more than a decade, civil war raged as two of Malik-Shah's sons struggled for the sultanate. One of the sons died in 1105, worn out at the age of twenty-five, leaving Muhammad (1105–1118) the sole ruler. Muhammad, however, relied on a surviving brother, Sanjar, to govern Khorasan for him. Muhammad's dynasty came to be referred to as the Great Saljuqs, to be distinguished from the Saljuq Sultanate of Rum at Nicaea in Anatolia. Headquartered at Esfahan, Muhammad had hardly noticed that, during the civil war with his brother, Frankish warriors had taken control of his father's Mediterranean coastline.

## The Fatimid Empire

The secretive and underground Isma'ili sect surfaced in the ninth century and made a bid for political power as a force known to history as the Fatimids. In 910, the Fatimids seized power in Ifriqiya, and within a few decades they established their

capital in Egypt. Fatimid Egypt quickly blossomed into one of the most advanced societies in the world, posing a serious threat to its Sunni rivals. Almost as quickly, however, it faded to second-rate status. By the end of the eleventh century, it occupied space but was nearly irrelevant as a geopolitical factor.

### The Conquest of Egypt and Palestine

When we last saw the Fatimids, their plans to attack Egypt were foiled yet again by the Berber revolt of 943. A revolt of this magnitude had not occurred in two centuries, since the Great Berber Revolt of 740 initiated the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate of Damascus. The Fatimid regime had to fight for its life at a time when it might have been able to take advantage of the Buyid seizure of power in Baghdad. The Sunni governors of Egypt acknowledged the legitimacy of the Abbasid caliph but had cool relations with the Buyid military leaders. Had the Fatimids been able to attack Egypt in the late 940s, the chance that they would not have confronted Buyid reinforcements was good.

It took almost twenty years for the Fatimids to restore their control over the Maghrib. By the 960s, they were once again prepared to turn east. Having failed three times to capture Egypt, the regime prepared carefully for the campaign of 969. One decision was ideological: It changed the official genealogy for the Fatimids in order to attract the support of the far-flung Isma'ili community. The regime's founder, 'Abd Allah al-Mahdi, had claimed descent from Ja'far al-Sadiq's son 'Abd Allah. Without great fanfare, his grandson al-Mu'izz (953–976) consistently claimed descent from Isma'il instead, making the Fatimids "Isma'ilis" again.

Al-Mu'izz was fortunate to have as his chief of armies one of the greatest generals of the age, Jawhar al-Rumi, a former Greek slave. Jawhar developed a formidable army. Its core was composed of the Kutama Berbers, but it was supplemented by growing numbers of Sudanese, Slavic, and Greek troops. This army put down the Berber revolt and recaptured Sijilmasa and Fez between 958 and 960. With North Africa pacified, al-Mu'izz set his sights on Egypt. This time the Fatimids won a surprisingly easy victory in 969.

Jawhar administered Egypt until the caliph-Imam al-Mu'izz arrived in 973. One of Jawhar's first official acts was to found a new capital city for his master. The existing capital, Fustat, had been a garrison for the Arabs since its founding in 640. Jawhar's task was to create an imperial city that reflected the glory of the new dynasty. He laid out the boundaries of the new capital some three miles to the northeast of Fustat, calling it al-Qahira al-Mu'izziya, "Victorious (City) of al-Mu'izz," or Cairo. Surrounded by high walls, it was to be the center of government and of the Fatimid religion. For many years, it was composed almost exclusively of palaces, mosques, and barracks for the troops.

The new government initially sought to challenge Baghdad for the allegiance of the world's Muslims, but it ran into problems when its army began occupying territories in Palestine. The indigenous Carmathians of Syria called upon the aid of their compatriots in Bahrain, and the two groups joined together to thwart the eastward expansion of Fatimid rule. For eight years, they fiercely resisted their fellow Isma'ilis. The Carmathians seriously impeded the Fatimid consolidation of power in Palestine, and they invaded Egypt twice before being decisively defeated. The

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**FIGURE 6.3** The Bab al-Futuh city gate in the original, tenth-century Fatimid city wall of Cairo.

JTB MEDIA CREATION, Inc. / Alamy Stock Photo.

Fatimids did manage to have the prayers in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina said in the name of the Fatimid caliph, but otherwise their expansionist aspirations were largely disappointed. At its height at the beginning of the eleventh century, the Fatimid caliphate directly controlled Libya, Egypt, Palestine, and the upper Red Sea coast. Al-Mu‘izz was content to rule Ifriqiya indirectly through the Zirid dynasty, a Berber family that had been rewarded for its loyalty with the governorship of the region when al-Mu‘izz departed for Egypt.

### Religious Policies

In light of the resources that the Fatimids had devoted to missionary activity and the expansion of territory under their control, it would have been reasonable to expect that the new regime would attempt to turn Egypt into an Isma‘ili society from which to convert the rest of the Muslim world. Their actual policies were somewhat surprising. On the one hand, the Fatimids did promote Shi‘ism within their realm. They quickly adopted the observance of Ghadir Khumm and Ashura from the Buyids. By the early twelfth century, they had introduced a festival of their own: Mawlid al-Nabi, the birthday of the Prophet. Although Ghadir Khumm, for obvious reasons, remains a distinctly Shi‘ite festival, both Ashura and Mawlid al-Nabi are widely celebrated among both Sunni and Shi‘ite communities today.

On the other hand, the Fatimids became surprisingly tolerant rulers in Egypt. For over fifty years, the Fatimids had persecuted Ibadī Kharijism and Sunni Maliki jurists in Ifriqiya in a brutal campaign of terror and extortion. The campaign did

scatter the Ibadis, but the martyrdom of Maliki ulama only increased the hostility of Sunnis toward the regime. By the 970s, the new leaders of the regime appear to have learned something from that experience. Although the Fatimid Imams continued an active and wide-ranging missionary program all across the Muslim world, their religious policies in Egypt were benign. Ismaʿili missionary activity, based on the model of a master and his initiates, was intended to bring about the conversion of spiritual adepts, not the masses. Prayers in the mosque were given for the Fatimid caliph, but otherwise Sunni prayers, doctrines, and ritual were hardly affected. During the first few decades of Fatimid rule, Fatimid law was dominant and held sway in the event of conflicts with Sunni schools, but by the middle of the eleventh century the Sunni schools were given equal status.

Fatimid authorities were, indeed, vigilant in monitoring Sunnis regarding their pro-Abbasid sympathies, and they were reluctant to allow them to serve in the government. Jews and Christians, on the other hand, enjoyed unique opportunities in Fatimid Egypt, and many of them served in large numbers in the government. Twice—under al-ʿAziz (976–996) and al-Hafiz (1131–1150)—Christians served as wazir. Jews served in high offices in such numbers that Abbasid partisans claimed that the Fatimids were actually a Jewish dynasty. During the Fatimid period, Copts were the majority in many of the rural areas and in towns that specialized in the manufacture of textiles. Whereas Sunni rulers (and insecure Fatimid wazirs) occasionally felt compelled to respond to the sensitivities or fears of the masses regarding religious minorities, the Imams, as divinely appointed agents, felt no such compulsion. Imams were even known to visit churches and monasteries and to observe Christian festivals such as Epiphany and the Coptic New Year. With one exception, Imams did not persecute Christians or Jews. The street crowd, however, could become dangerous. In 996, at the death of Imam al-ʿAziz, who appointed a Christian wazir and otherwise showed toleration of Jews and Christians, a Sunni mob in Cairo plundered churches and murdered several Christians.

The caliph-Imam who violated the policy of toleration was al-Hakim (996–1021), the son of al-ʿAziz. For this reason he is, unfortunately, the most famous of the Fatimid rulers. Eleven years old when he succeeded his exceedingly able father, he killed his regent four years later and ruled on his own authority. During the remainder of his reign, he ordered the execution of several thousand people, many of whom were important officials in the government who never knew why they were targeted. He issued edicts that required the markets to be open all night, and he forbade the consumption of watercress and fish without scales. Once, he ordered that representations of the Christian cross not be shown in public, only to issue an order shortly thereafter requiring Christians to wear the cross. He ordered the destruction of many churches and synagogues, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

A little over halfway through his reign as Imam, al-Hakim became the center of a new religious movement. By that time, the Fatimids had been in power in Egypt for nearly half a century, and the apocalyptic expectations of many Ismaʿilis that the regime would enact a radically new order had been disappointed by what appeared to be nothing more than yet another mundane regime. About the year 1010, certain religious leaders in Cairo began teaching their initiates that al-Hakim was an incarnation or manifestation of the deity. The most visible spokesman for the cause

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was Muhammad al-Darazi, but soon devotees of the movement were to be found in considerable numbers all the way to Aleppo. They were called *al-duruz* (the Druze), a plural noun meaning “the followers of al-Darazi,” apparently because of the active role that al-Darazi played in the teaching of the new doctrines. Al-Darazi paid for his notoriety: He was assassinated in 1019, but it is not clear whether soldiers or jealous rivals within his own movement were responsible for his death.

In 1021, al-Hakim failed to return from one of his customary nighttime wanderings into the desert. Some suspected foul play, while those who worshiped him insisted that God had placed him in concealment. His successor as caliph persecuted the movement mercilessly, and soon the remaining members were living only in the mountains of Syria–Lebanon. The Druze, who call themselves *al-Muwahhidun*, or Unitarians, number about 300,000 today. They are not regarded as Muslims because of their unique doctrines and rituals.

In light of the apparent goal of the Fatimids while in Ifriqiya to dominate the known world, their subsequent actions in Egypt seem strangely unambitious. Aside from a persistent determination to maintain control of Palestine and the Hijaz in the face of various local and outside threats, the Fatimid government did not appear to be interested in territorial expansion. In fact, after the reign of al-‘Aziz (976–996), it maintained peaceful relations with the Byzantines throughout most of Fatimid history. In 1038, one of the many treaties concluded between the two governments allowed the Byzantines to rebuild the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The regime’s ambitions became focused on spreading its teachings. The famous mosque of al-Azhar, which was constructed in 970, became the setting for public lectures on the Isma‘ili school of law. Within the palace itself, the famous *dar al-hikma* (often translated as “House of Wisdom,” but “Repository of Wisdom” is probably closer to the intended meaning) trained missionaries for the purpose of spreading Isma‘ili doctrines throughout the Muslim world. Fatimid missionary activities reached their peak during the reign of al-Mustansir (1036–1094), with agents active in Iraq, Fars, Khorasan, Transoxiana, and India. Al-Basasiri’s short-lived coup in Baghdad in 1058 appeared to be a major triumph for these efforts at first, before the fatal breakdown in relations between al-Basasiri and the Fatimids.

### The New Egyptian Economy

Despite the eccentricities and distractions of the reign of al-Hakim, the Fatimid state continued to thrive for several decades. From the late tenth century until the middle of the eleventh, it was the preeminent empire in the Mediterranean basin and in the Muslim world. Its wealth was based on the agricultural productivity of the rich Nile valley, but commercial contacts with areas as far apart as Morocco and India supplemented the economic base. The empire’s own conquests in the Maghrib had established links there, and its missionary work resulted in the presence of numerous Isma‘ili merchants in Sind and Gujarat, who worked to funnel as much as possible of the trade from those important commercial centers to Egypt.

The Fatimids had become established in Egypt at a fortuitous time in economic history. First, Western Europe, which had been a poverty-stricken hinterland for the previous five centuries, was slowly developing a stable economy on the foundations of the medieval agricultural revolution. This in turn spawned the emergence of

towns where the new agricultural surplus could be marketed. The nobility and the new merchant class, their pockets brimming with newfound wealth, were developing a taste for luxury goods from the East. It turned out that both Christians and Muslims overcame their religious scruples when it came to trade, for the emerging Italian maritime city-states and the Fatimids eagerly sought each other's trade.

Second, as we saw in Chapter 4, the Fatimids were the beneficiaries of changes in major trade routes. Much of the trans-Saharan trade shifted from Ifriqiya to Egypt when the Fatimids' traditional sub-Saharan suppliers saw that the new imperial market in Egypt was much more lucrative than the provincial markets of North Africa. The Fatimids also benefitted from the turmoil that began in Iraq during the late ninth century during the Zanj revolt. South Asian merchants who had been accustomed to shipping goods through the Persian Gulf and across Iraq and Syria now looked for a trade route that could guarantee them safety and a demand for their goods. They found it in the Red Sea route, where the Fatimid navy controlled both the Red Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. A portage of one hundred miles from the Red Sea carried goods to Cairo, which was linked to the Mediterranean via the Nile. Spices, perfumes, and fabrics from South Asia and Southeast Asia were in heavy demand all around the Mediterranean, and in return the Indian Ocean suppliers received the products of the Mediterranean hinterland: fine glassware, cloth, furs, and gold. Egypt itself was famous for producing remarkably high-quality fabrics, jewelry, pottery, and crystal ware.

### Ominous Developments

At the middle of the eleventh century, the Fatimids began to experience a series of jolts that shook the very basis of their regime. The first was a factional conflict within the military. The Fatimid army had begun as a mixed force based on a Kutama Berber lance-bearing cavalry supplemented by Slavic and Greek infantry. The conflict with the Carmathians in Syria during the 970s, however, had demonstrated to Fatimid commanders that Berber lancers were vulnerable to mounted archers. As a result, the regime soon began importing both slave and free Turkic cavalry as mounted archers. Moreover, the change in the regime's base from Ifriqiya to Egypt meant that it was now more economical to employ Daylamis and black Sudanese in the infantry than Slavs and Greeks, who were more difficult to obtain.

Within a few years, two major rifts within the military began to reveal themselves. One was that the Turks threatened the privileged position of the Kutama, and the tensions were expressed by violent encounters between the two groups. The second was that the infantry, which achieved parity in numbers with the cavalry, began to demand more equitable treatment. Both conflicts had ethnic overtones. Within the ranks of the cavalry itself, Turks and Berbers were clashing as early as 1044 over scarce resources, and a civil war between units of Turkic cavalry and black infantry erupted in 1066. Cairo suffered extensive damage, and the violence in the countryside caused fields to be unattended, a factor contributing to a seven-year-long famine. As if these miseries were not enough, a plague struck Egypt in 1063, and in 1069 the governor of Mecca and Medina transferred his allegiance to the Saljuqs and had prayers said in the name of the Abbasid caliph.

The turmoil within the Fatimid military at midcentury led to such destruction and economic distress that, in 1073, the caliph-Imam al-Mustansir was forced to seek

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the assistance of his governor in Palestine, Badr al-Jamali. Badr went to Cairo, where he combined the role of wazir with full military powers. Badr, a converted Armenian, was a forceful personality who realized that drastic steps had to be taken to save the regime. He brought with him thousands of his own Christian Armenian troops to be the core of his military force, and he began replacing the troublesome Turkic mamluks with Sudanese infantry, a trend that continued over the next century until the Sudanese units became the largest contingent in the army.

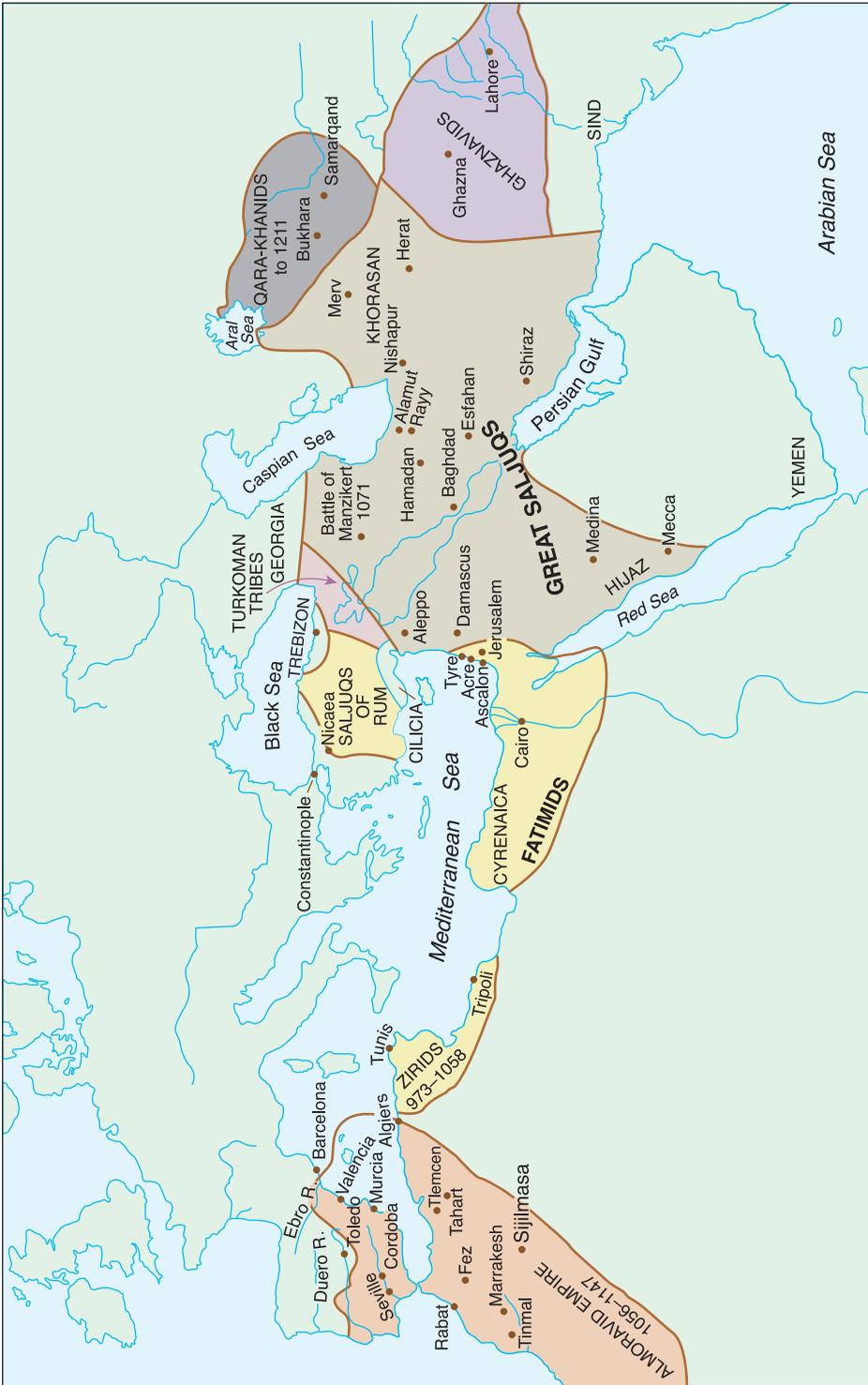
Badr al-Jamali's promotion achieved al-Mustansir's immediate goal, but it had two major drawbacks. First, the withdrawal of the Armenian troops from Palestine allowed the Saljuq ruler Malik-Shah to seize most of Palestine with ease. Second, Badr never yielded the reins of power in Egypt until his death in 1094, leaving al-Mustansir as subservient to his military leadership as the Abbasid caliphs had been to military officers since the early tenth century. The position of the caliph-Imam in Egypt never regained its prominence.

### The Nizaris ("Assassins")

The Saljuq court had been hostile to the Fatimids ever since the latter had supported al-Basasiri in his attempt to overthrow Tughril. Nizam al-Mulk, in particular, became increasingly concerned about the Fatimid threat because of a new militancy among the Isma'ilis of Iran. In 1090, the former quietism of that group gave way to a policy of assassinating public officials. The architect of the new policy was Hasan-i Sabbah, an Iranian from the city of Qum. He had studied in Cairo at the Dar al-Hikma and then returned to Iran, probably in the late 1070s. The Isma'ili message seems to have gained new strength in the aftermath of the Saljuq invasion, combining the traditional demand for social justice with a heightened sense of Iranian ethnicity that emerged in reaction to the Turkish invaders. Isma'ilis were to be found all across Iran by the closing decades of the century, and Hasan found particularly strong support in the traditionally Shi'ite region of Daylam.

In 1090, Hasan acquired Alamut, a fortress in the Elburz range that proved to be impregnable for more than a century and a half. Hasan began a campaign against the Saljuqs, who were doubly despised as advocates of Sunnism and as outsiders. Recognizing that winning pitched battles against the Saljuq army was not a realistic goal, he began a policy of assassinating Saljuq officials. The legend arose that the agents who were sent out from Alamut for the purpose of murdering officials were administered hashish during a ritual. No evidence supports the idea that the drug was used in this way, but the agents nevertheless gained the nickname of *hashishin*, or hashish users. The English word *assassin* derives etymologically from this word, with the result that Hasan's followers have been known as the Assassins for centuries. After killing several minor officials, the Assassins made a spectacular "hit" in 1092 by killing their old nemesis, Nizam al-Mulk, possibly in collusion with none other than Malik-Shah, who was clearly chafing after twenty years of the old Iranian's imperious tutelage.

Hasan's career took a turn in 1094, when a schism developed within the Fatimid movement. The Fatimid caliph-Imam al-Mustansir died a few months after Badr al-Jamali's death in 1094. Confusion over the succession process followed. The new



MAP 6.2 The Muslim World, Late Eleventh Century.

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wazir, Badr's son al-Afdal, favored the youngest son, al-Musta'li, but the eldest son, Nizar, claimed that his father had designated him to be his successor. In the subsequent conflict, Nizar fled Cairo but was captured and murdered by being entombed within a wall. Al-Musta'li became the new Imam, but the supporters of the two sons formed rival factions that became bitter enemies.

The schism within the Fatimid ruling family in Cairo reverberated throughout the Isma'ili world. Al-Musta'li came to be recognized by most Isma'ilis in Egypt, many in Palestine, and by almost all Isma'ilis in Yemen. The Sulayhid regime in Yemen, ruled by the capable queen al-Sayyida al-Hurra al-Sulayhi (1084–1138), played a vital role in expanding the Musta'li branch of Isma'ilism. She sponsored extensive missionary activity in the Gujarat region of India on behalf of the cause, and the Musta'lis became permanently well-established there.

Hasan-i Sabbah, on the other hand, sided with Nizar's claim to be the Imam. He claimed that a son of Nizar had somehow been safely sequestered at Alamut. The masses of Nizaris never saw him, but Hasan served until his death in 1124 as the *hujja*, or agent, of the Imam who he claimed was in safekeeping. Hasan's considerable personal authority influenced many Isma'ilis in Syria and the vast majority of Isma'ilis in Iran to become "Nizaris." The upshot was that the "Musta'lis" had a visible caliph–Imam to follow, but one who was under the actual authority of al-Afdal, the Armenian wazir. The Fatimid state had become a hollow shell by this time. It remained intact for another century only because of a peculiar set of international affairs that we shall examine in the next chapter. The Assassins, by contrast, were about to embark upon a period of history that would immortalize their name.

Hasan, therefore, by 1094 led a movement opposed to both the Saljuqs and the Fatimids. Because of his highly publicized activism, he attracted the support of Isma'ilis throughout Iran and Syria, and he soon came to rule over what was in effect a Nizari "state." It was not a territorial country with borders; instead, it was composed of widely scattered fortresses, together with surrounding farms, villages, and, in a few cases, towns. The fortresses were located in eastern and southern Iran, the Elburz and Zagros mountain ranges, and northern Syria. Although occasionally a local Isma'ili leader might disagree with a policy adopted at Alamut, most of the time the various Nizari communities worked together with remarkable coordination. Hasan and his seven successors were commonly referred to as the Lords of Alamut. Alamut itself developed a reputation not only for terror, but also for being an intellectual center. As we shall see, Nizaris were remarkably active in the cultural life of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Alamut housed one of the world's greatest research libraries of the period and hosted many scholars. Twelver Shi'ites and Sunnis were as welcome there as Isma'ilis.

## The Muslim West

The Muslim coastal regions of the western Mediterranean enjoyed a halcyon period during the second half of the tenth century. The eleventh century, on the other hand, witnessed a profound change in the fortunes of the region. A combination of internal conflicts and foreign invaders threatened the very existence of the western wing of the Dar al-Islam and led to the permanent loss of Sicily and parts of Andalus.

### Norman Invasions of Muslim Territory

A major theme in the history of the western Mediterranean basin in the eleventh century was the advent of a people known as the Normans. The Normans, who are more famous in northwestern Europe for William the Conqueror's exploits of 1066 at Hastings, had made a name for themselves years earlier in the warmer climes of the Mediterranean. They were the vanguard of an expansive Europe that was undergoing an economic revival and a "baby boom." Abundant food, commerce, cities, and education were finally coming to Western Europe. The wealth and power of that society expressed itself in the military expeditions of the eleventh century by the knights of the various Norman conquests, the Reconquista, and the Crusades. The earliest triumphs were by the Normans, and they inflicted territorial losses on the Muslims that have lasted to the present.

Beginning in the early eleventh century, small groups of Norman adventurers began entering southern Italy in search of their fortune. In that welter of small, feuding states they sold their services to local lords and then took over from their erstwhile masters. Some of them took advantage of Zirid weakness as early as 1034 and began occupying port cities in Ifriqiya. Of much greater interest to them, however, was Sicily, which had the appeal both of proximity to the Italian Peninsula and great wealth.

Sicily had been under Muslim control for two centuries. The Aghlabids of Ifriqiya had slowly conquered the island from the Byzantines during the period 827–878. As an Aghlabid possession, Sicily served as a base for Muslim raids into Italy, the most famous of which was the sack of the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul in 848. In 909–910, the Fatimids conquered the Aghlabids and thereby became the masters of Sicily. By midcentury, when the great Fatimid general Jawhar was preoccupied with reestablishing control over the Berbers of Ifriqiya and with planning the conquest of Egypt, the island had become in effect an autonomous province under a local Muslim dynasty.

Throughout its two centuries as a Muslim-controlled island, Sicily played an important political and cultural role. Like every other Mediterranean state of the period, its relations with its neighbors, Christian and Muslim alike, included piracy, wars, trade agreements, and cultural exchanges. The island's agriculture, like that of Andalus, achieved unprecedented prosperity as a result of new irrigation techniques, the breaking up of large land holdings, and the introduction of new crops such as citrus fruits, sugar cane, new vegetables, and date palms. Castles, palaces, mosques, and gardens patterned after Iranian models changed the landscape, and poetry, law, and Qur'anic studies flourished. Sicilian Christians and Jews assumed the typical status of *dhimmi*s, paying the poll tax but enjoying freedom of worship.

After about 1040, two developments led to the destruction of Muslim Sicily. First, the authority of the ruling Muslim dynasty was eroded, and Sicily fragmented politically. Then, in the 1060s, Robert Guiscard and his brother Roger began consolidating Norman power in southern Italy and eventually formed an alliance with the pope. They conquered Byzantine territories in Italy, and in 1081 Robert began an anti-Byzantine campaign in the Balkans that the Byzantine emperor defeated only with Venetian help.

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Meanwhile, Roger, acting as his brother's vassal, began conquering Sicily in 1061. As in the case of the Muslim conquest of the island two centuries earlier, the task required several decades. It was finally completed in 1090. Roger's son, Roger II, brought about the unification of the Norman territories of Sicily and the Italian mainland in 1127, creating the new Kingdom of Sicily. The first Norman rulers were intrigued by Islamic civilization, and under their patronage a flourishing synthesis of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian civilization occurred. In the twelfth century, however, the Reconquista and Crusades created a hostile climate for Muslims and Jews. Sicily was lost to the Dar al-Islam.

### The "Hilali Invasion" of Ifriqiya

Muslims in Alid-ruled Ifriqiya were concerned about a Norman conquest there as well. During a period of twenty-six years after 1034, the Normans methodically captured Tripoli, Jerba, Sfax, Sousse, Mahdiya, and Tunis. Whatever the Norman ambitions in Ifriqiya were, however, the invaders soon learned that a large-scale conquest was out of the question. The Norman army was not large enough to garrison all the cities and had to make alliances with local tribes for security purposes. Moreover, the foreigners soon learned that the region was not as prosperous as it had been earlier. Ifriqiya still had the aura of its former glory under the Aghlabid (800–909) and Fatimid (910–973) regimes, which had stimulated a lucrative, long-distance caravan trade across the Sahara. Their lavish courts had placed a premium on luxury goods, and their possession of Sicily facilitated commerce with European ports. The creation of a commercial network that linked Europe and Ghana had made merchants in many ports in Ifriqiya wealthy during the ninth and tenth centuries.

Sicily, however, became autonomous during the Fatimid wars to suppress the Berber revolts of the mid-tenth century, and its commercial links with Ifriqiya were loosened. Subsequently, the departure of the Fatimid court for Egypt in 973 diverted much of the Saharan trade from Ifriqiya to the much larger metropolitan area of Fustat–Cairo. Thus, by the eleventh century, Ifriqiya was already feeling the effects of a decline in the long-distance trade that had once crossed the region. Information about the Norman presence in Ifriqiya is sketchy, but it is clear that the serial seizure of the port cities after 1034 was accompanied by raids into the hinterland and agreements with local tribes to secure cities for them. Agriculture may well have suffered from the raids and from the free hand given to the local nomads.

The diversion of the trade routes to Egypt, the Norman capture of the most important ports, and the crisis in Sicily after the Norman conquest began there in 1061 might well have been sufficient to leave a permanent scar on the economic history of North Africa. All those developments, however, have been overshadowed in the annals and in epic poetry by yet another incident at midcentury. In 1051, the Zirid leader of Ifriqiya, whose regime had been autonomous under the Fatimids for decades, bowed to the pressure of his Maliki ulama and publicly humiliated the Fatimids by declaring his allegiance to the Abbasid caliph. In view of the Abbasid caliph's abject weakness in both religious and political affairs at the time (these were the last days of the Shi'ite Buyid regime in Baghdad), this declaration was particularly galling to the Fatimid court and was viewed as a blatant insult. According to legend,

the Fatimid wazir persuaded Imam al-Mustansir to punish the disloyal Zirid ruler and simultaneously rid his realm of a domestic problem: He encouraged a number of bedouin tribes that were posing a threat to villages in the Nile valley to migrate into Ifriqiya. The Banu Hilal and the Banu Sulaym were the most famous of the bedouin tribes that migrated westward.

The “Hilali invasion” has long been blamed for the economic decline that undoubtedly occurred in Ifriqiya during the eleventh century. It has inspired Arab epic poetry and shaped our historical understanding of the period. Recent research on the economy of the era and the impact of the Norman raids, however, has modified that picture considerably. There is no evidence that the Fatimids actually sent bedouin into Ifriqiya. The Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym were Arab tribes grazing their herds to the west of the Nile, and they seem to have migrated west about the time that the Zirids made their declaration. The Banu Sulaym settled in Cyrenaica (eastern Libya), but the Banu Hilal continued to Ifriqiya. There they harassed the Zirids during the 1050s, forcing the ruling family to abandon Qayrawan and move to the better-fortified city of Mahdiya.

Other Arab tribes continued to move into the coastal plain of North Africa during this period. Some stayed north along the Mediterranean coast, and others migrated along the eastern slopes of the High Atlas into southern Morocco. These incursions coincided with continued Norman raids along the coast of Ifriqiya. From Ifriqiya to Morocco, agriculture on the coastal plains was disrupted; the city of Qayrawan was largely abandoned and its economic and cultural influence plummeted; and Arab tribesmen feuded among themselves and with Berber tribes, making travel and commerce even riskier than before. The Normans soon drove the Zirids out of Mahdiya and captured the city. They also conquered Tunis and contracted with a Berber chief to rule the city for them. They now controlled the important ports from Tripoli to Tunis.

The Arab nomads were no doubt destructive, just as they were in many other regions of the Dar al-Islam at one time or another. Their impact now seems to have been cumulative, however, rather than decisive. They were one factor, along with the slowing of long-distance trade and the Norman invasions, that led to the economic decline of North Africa. On the other hand, regardless of the precise economic role of this second Arab invasion, it did have a significant cultural legacy. It accomplished what the Umayyad conquest of North Africa had not: the displacement of Berber by Arabic as the lingua franca of the North African coastal plain. The growing number of powerful Arab tribes caused their language and customs slowly to become dominant on the coastal plain, so that the region became in many ways a cultural extension of the Arab East. The majority use of Berber languages became confined to the mountains and the desert regions.

### A Berber Empire

The Maghrib west of Ifriqiya was without a major state during the three centuries between the time of the Great Berber Revolt of 740 and the middle of the eleventh century. During that period, the region witnessed the rise of numerous petty principalities, such as Tahart, Sijilmasa, Tlemcen, and Fez. Most were Berber, while Fez was the notable Arab-led ministate. By the middle of the eleventh century,

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however, a religious movement among a Berber tribe in southern Morocco gave rise to the Almoravid Empire, a state that would play a major role in the geopolitics of the era and help to lay the foundation for modern Morocco.

The seventh-century Arab conquest in North Africa had followed closely the contours of Roman settlement. In order to protect those areas from Berber incursions and Byzantine naval attacks, Arab leaders established garrisons in forts along the lines of settlement and along the coast. Such forts in Andalus and Ifriqiya came to be known as *ribats*. Often local citizens would supplement the regular soldiers in the forts as a civic and religious duty. During the ninth century, the long campaign by the Aghlabids to conquer Sicily had intensified this process, as garrisons kept watch for signs of the Byzantine fleet, which occasionally attacked in retaliation. The men who lived in the forts—and especially the civilians who did so—were known as *murabitun* (sing. *murabit*). Thus, in the coastal areas of the western Mediterranean, as along many other frontiers of the Dar al-Islam (including the Andalusī–Christian frontier and the Turkish–Byzantine frontier), “warriors for the faith” had become a familiar feature of daily life.

As the military threat receded along the coasts, the *ribats* of Ifriqiya lost their military importance, and their combined military–religious function evolved into a religious one. They often developed into centers where men came to strengthen their devotional life through prayer and spiritual exercises. In Morocco, the process was almost the reverse: The term *ribat* had been used for centers of religious instruction since the ninth century, even in cases where there had not been a fort. Because they were usually situated in tribal markets or on former religious sites, they were nodes of interaction among various groups, some of whom were mutually hostile. The spiritual leaders tried to play a mediating role, but clashes did happen. Over time, the *ribats* of Morocco became fortified in order to provide the local population with a secure refuge. They were fortified religious schools.

From the late ninth century on, many of the *murabitun* moved from the coasts of the Atlantic and Mediterranean into the Atlas Mountains and into the plains along the desert edge, where they could spread their faith among Berber villagers. There, because of their isolation from the trade routes, many of the Berbers had never encountered Islam or were only vaguely familiar with the rituals and doctrines of the faith. The *murabitun* taught the fundamentals of the faith, made charms and amulets for the sick and the lovelorn, and served as spiritual advisors. For many of the secluded villages, the *murabitun* were the first tangible contact with the world of Islam that they had ever experienced.

It was among the Sanhaja Berbers, who lived south of the High Atlas Mountains and north of the Senegal and Niger rivers, that a spiritual movement began that would transform the history of both the Maghrib and Andalus. The Sanhaja had been only lightly Islamized by the early eleventh century, but one of their chieftains returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca about the year 1035 accompanied by a young religious teacher. The teacher, ‘Abdullah ibn Yasin, imposed a strict religious and moral discipline on his followers and began to implement the Maliki law code in their affairs. Because of his emphasis on the importance of the Shari‘a, his movement—at least in the eyes of its critics—developed a tendency toward legalism. For a decade, the leaders of the new movement used force to spread their version of Islam among fellow Sanhaja groups. They closed taverns, destroyed musical



**FIGURE 6.4** The ribat at Monastir, Tunisia. It was founded in the late eighth century, but the Aghlabids and Fatimids expanded it.

instruments, and abolished illegal taxes. Because their religious fervor reminded others of the men of the ribat, they became known as *al-murabitun*, a term that has been anglicized as Almoravids.

During the 1050s, the movement began expanding into southern Morocco, and it gained a new leader in 1061 in the figure of Ibn Tashfin. He was a talented military and political leader, and under him the movement enjoyed tremendous expansion. In 1062, he established Marrakesh as his capital, and by 1069 he had control of Morocco. By 1082 his rule extended from the southern Sahara to the Mediterranean and from the Atlantic to Algiers. For the first time in history, this area was subject to a single political authority. Later in the decade, the power of this new state expanded into Andalus, as we shall see later in this chapter.

### The Collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate of Andalus

The strong rule of ‘Abd al-Rahman III (912–961) provided hope to some (and fear to others) that a powerful central government had at last been established in Andalus. Events were soon to demonstrate once again, however, that stability in the peninsula was dependent upon the personality of a charismatic ruler. By the last quarter of the century, the number of converts to Islam had swelled dramatically compared to a few decades earlier and so had the number of Berbers and Slavs, both brought in by ‘Abd al-Rahman III and his successor to bolster their armies. The society became splintered into factions. Arab tribes maintained feuds whose origins were often obscure, the

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social cleavage between Arab and non-Arab Muslims persisted, and Berbers who had been born in Andalus resented the arrival of recent Berber immigrants. Outbreaks of violence among the various ethnic groups were frequent, and the most commonly heard complaint was that of the arrogance of the Arabs. Many of the “Arabs” of Andalus in fact had mothers who were Eastern European slave girls, but they continued to trace their origin patrilineally and claimed high status by virtue of their Arab lineage.

When a weak ruler came to the throne in 1002, the stage was set for the various cleavages in society to widen irrevocably. The civil war that many had anticipated broke out in 1009 and did not end until 1031. By the conclusion of the conflict, the withered authority of the Umayyad dynasty had altogether disintegrated. The traditional political fragmentation of the peninsula reasserted itself, and the Umayyad caliphate’s authority was replaced by more than three dozen independent Muslim city–states. Arab historians have called the rulers of these tiny states *muluk al-tawa’if*, or “party-kings,” suggesting that they were the instruments of one interest group or another. Some of these party-kings were Arabs; others were Berbers and Slavs. Even a prince of the Berber Zirid family that ruled Ifriqiya went to Andalus to fight on behalf of the caliph during the civil war. He eventually took control of Granada in 1012, and his descendants ruled it until 1090. The Zirids of Granada became famous for their alliance with the Jewish Nagrella family, which provided the chief administrators for the state.

Several of the small new states experienced unprecedented economic prosperity due to the fact that their surplus was no longer being siphoned off to Cordoba. The economic boom generated a cultural efflorescence that made the eleventh and twelfth centuries the golden age of Andalusian arts and letters, just as the tenth century had been the pinnacle of its political power. Cordoba’s wealth, however, had depended on the surplus extracted from other regions, and now that it was no longer able to obtain it, the city began to decline. Toledo, Zaragoza, and Seville benefitted the most from Cordoba’s displacement. Of those three, Seville became the preeminent city of Andalus for the next two centuries.

The collapse of the Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba entailed a reversion to the status quo that had prevailed during most of the previous three centuries: political fragmentation in Andalus. Many, if not most, Muslims of the peninsula seem to have been more content with less power at the political center. As we have seen, the loss of political centralization even enhanced, rather than harmed, the economic and cultural life of eleventh-century Andalus. On the other hand, the feuding of the city-states seems to have exacerbated the deeply rooted ethnic tensions of Andalus. In some Arab-dominated cities, Muslim Berbers were subjected to the sumptuary laws intended for Christians and Jews but rarely enforced on them. Berbers were even prohibited from riding horses or carrying arms. This humiliation was followed by an anti-Berber pogrom in Cordoba that spread to other cities, and in some clashes between Berbers and Arabs, acts of ritualistic cannibalism were committed on both sides. A revealing insight into the problems of Andalusian society is found in the plight of the last Zirid ruler of Granada, who, although totally Arabized, felt stigmatized by Arabs to the end of his life because of his Berber origins.

The disintegration of the caliphate played into the hands of the Christian kingdoms to the north, which were growing in strength. They had been prospering

ever since the identification in 813 of a site in the extreme northwest of the peninsula as the tomb of St. James. It was soon christened Santiago de Compostela, and it became the third greatest object of Christian pilgrimage (after Jerusalem and Rome) during the Middle Ages. Because of the pilgrimage traffic, Asturias and Navarre increased in wealth. Investing its new wealth in its military forces, Asturias pushed to the south as far as the Duero River and then consolidated its power westward to the Atlantic. By the tenth century, it was increasingly known by the name of its southern region, Leon. Its dramatic rise to power was cut short in the middle of the tenth century, however, when its eastern province, Castile, broke away and became a rival kingdom. For the remainder of the century, Leon and Castile—as well as Navarre and Barcelona—were on the defensive against the caliphate and suffered repeated invasions from ‘Abd al-Rahman III and his immediate successors.

The eleventh century witnessed a reversal of the balance of power between the Christian north and Muslim south. The political fragmentation of the Muslims after their civil war (1009–1031) provided Christian states the opportunity to exact tribute from the weaker Muslim rulers just as the caliphate of Cordoba had exacted tribute from the Christians in the tenth century. Castile, in particular, became the beneficiary of Muslim weakness after the civil war. Many party-kings now paid tribute in the form of “protection money” to persuade Castile not to attack them. Muslim states not infrequently even allied with one or more of the Christian kingdoms against their Muslim rivals. The wealth of the Christian kingdoms expanded dramatically as the tribute money from Muslim states poured in and as agricultural lands were opened up in the Duero valley once the caliphate was no longer a threat to Christian settlement there.

By the third quarter of the eleventh century, Castile had come to expect tribute as a right, and Muslim cities that refused to pay could expect a punitive campaign directed against them. The Muslims of Andalus had not been able to overcome their ethnic divisions and develop a cohesive identity within the framework of the Umma, even in the face of the growing menace to the north. They had gained temporary local freedom only at the expense of military weakness, which meant that in the long run they would fall victim to outside political control.

### The Incorporation of Andalus into the Maghrib

While Ibn Tashfin was conquering the vast territory between the Atlantic and Ifriqiya under the Almoravid banner, Castile and Leon intensified their campaigns against the party-kings of Andalus, who belatedly realized the vulnerable position of their mutually hostile city-states. In 1082, the ulama of several cities in Andalus appealed to Ibn Tashfin to aid them in thwarting the designs of King Alfonso VI of Castile. Ibn Tashfin, however, considered the urban Muslim elites of Andalus to be a decadent class, hardly more worthy of aid than were the Christians. He was not surprised when, in 1085, Alfonso took over Muslim Toledo, practically without a fight. This large city, which had represented the first line of defense against the Christian powers for the other Muslim city-states, had been under the “protection” of Alfonso for some years. Alfonso had actually buttressed the authority of its inept and corrupt ruler against his fellow Muslim challengers, and he had had to intervene

## Civilization vs. Chaos, 950–1260

several times to save the ruler from his own mistakes and crimes. Tired of expending energy in order to protect such incompetence, Alfonso decided to take over the city directly.

Despite Ibn Tashfin's dislike for Andalusian society, he viewed the Christian capture of Toledo as an assault on the Dar al-Islam that he could not ignore. He crossed the Strait of Gibraltar for the sake of Islam but not to save the party-kings, for whom he did not bother to hide his contempt. In 1086, his Berber army defeated Alfonso's Castilian forces, and he laid siege to Toledo. During the siege of Toledo, Ibn Tashfin applied to the Abbasid caliph—at that time under the leash of Malik-Shah and Nizam al-Mulk—for recognition as ruler of the Maghrib and for the right to use the title *amir al-muslimin*, or “commander of the Muslims.” The title was remarkably close to the caliph's own title of *amir al-mu'minin*, or “commander of the faithful.” The caliph, however, flattered to be recognized as possessing authority and desperate to exercise it, eagerly granted him both requests. Moreover, he could not be unaware of the fact that, thanks to the Almoravid movement, the Friday prayers in the Maghrib were being recited in the name of an Abbasid caliph for the first time in more than 300 years.

Although Ibn Tashfin had defeated Alfonso in the field, he could not retake Toledo by siege. Moreover, relations between him and the party-kings deteriorated quickly from suspicion to hostility. He and they belonged to two radically different cultures: He was pious and ascetic and they were worldly and self-indulgent. He was a rustic Berber and spoke Arabic with difficulty; they were sophisticates who valued elegance, education, and refinement. He and his male followers wore veils whereas their women did not; this scandalized the menfolk of Andalus, whose women were veiled. When the party-kings failed to cooperate with Ibn Tashfin's military campaigns, his first impulse was to abandon them to their fate at the hands of the Christians, and he returned to Morocco. After several months of reflection in the quiet of his palace, however, his sense of responsibility for defending the Umma overcame his dislike for the Andalusian elites. He became convinced that it was his calling to keep the Christians out of Andalus and to reform the society along the lines laid out by Ibn Yasin. He returned to Andalus, and from 1090 until his death in 1106, Ibn Tashfin methodically captured all the city-states but Zaragoza, which did not fall to the Almoravids until 1110. Although he managed to capture and unite the Muslim city-states, he was not able to win back any significant territory that the Christians had captured prior to his arrival in Andalus.

## Conclusion

By 1100, the Umayyad caliphate of Andalus was as dead as its namesake in Damascus. The Fatimid caliphate was under the control of its wazir—military general, just as the Abbasid caliphate was under the control of the Saljuq sultan. The institution of the caliphate had lost its aura for many Sunnis. The caliph was not a source of religious leadership. Doctrinal and ethical leadership was to be found among private scholars—the ulama—who discovered God's will by means of jurisprudence. A deeper, personal relationship with God was to be found by seeking out the guidance of a Sufi master (who, increasingly, might also be one of the ulama). The caliph was

also not the model of the Just Ruler. The government itself was increasingly viewed as remote, oppressive, and interested in its subjects only for the taxes they owed. Shi'ites, on the other hand, were convinced that the problems of society were caused precisely because the majority of Muslims had not recognized that the only legitimate caliph was to be found in the lineage of Muhammad through 'Ali. That the Twelvers, Musta'lis, Nizaris, and Zaydis all disagreed over who the legitimate caliph-Imam should be was a stumbling block for the Sunnis, but it did not shake the confidence of the Shi'ites themselves.

The violence of the late tenth and eleventh centuries had been exhausting and destructive. The bedouin and Turkish nomads enjoyed the skirmishes, but all pious urban Muslims, at any rate, could agree that the struggle among ambitious warlords was an affront to God's desire for order and justice and that invasions by nomads and by Christian Europeans were detrimental to the development of a cultured and stable life. What they could not know at the end of our period was that the violence of the previous 150 years was minor compared to what lay ahead.

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### The Muslim West

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# PORTRAITS OF EASTERN EUROPE

## Conclusion – pulling back the curtain

*Christian Raffensperger*

### **History and imagination**

Though the lives portrayed in this volume can best be described as “imagined,” they are real representations of our modern understanding of the past. The scholars who have created these portraits researched the context for each life that they imagined and they created a realistic, if not real, portrait of what life was like for a Scandinavian trader, a princess in Rus’, or a Serbian monk. The readings that they have provided at the end of their portraits give you a sample of what you too can use to investigate the lives of these medieval individuals. For more information on these individuals, and more resources to investigate their lives, you can utilize the companion website to the project – [www.routledge.com/cw/ostrowski](http://www.routledge.com/cw/ostrowski).

The discussion that I would like to have here, though, is one about history and how history is created. Once upon a time (typically we generalize this to the nineteenth century, but it happens still today), historians viewed history as a collection of “facts” that could be learned from primary sources (documents written at or around the time of the events that they describe). Those facts could then be assembled to present an accurate representation of what life was like in whatever period of history was under investigation. Developments in historiography over the course of the twentieth century called the basic fundamentals of this process into question – they problematized not only primary sources and their purpose but the existence of objective “facts” in the first place. This culminated in the postmodern movement in history, which has become most identified with these views and which has shaped the current generation of historians to a great degree, this historian included. One historian has suggested that, for historians, postmodernism “is the prioritization of language over experience, leading to outright skepticism as to the human capacity to observe and interpret the external world, and especially the human world.”<sup>1</sup> What to do with this problem and this shift has provoked multiple responses among

historians, but the way that I have dealt with this is to incorporate these ideas into an overarching context for the historical progression. Just as we stress context for the development of historical ideas in the classroom, we must rely as well on the understanding that the historical profession evolves and changes over time. Postmodernism, and the questioning of the observable, provable nature of historical fact, is just one of those schools of thought that has adapted to help historians study history.

The problematic nature of history and “fact” has provoked much discussion in college classrooms as students, who learned history as a series of names and dates to be tested on in high school, transitioned to a history curriculum where history, the pre-modern world in particular, is much more amorphous and full of “probablys,” “maybes,” and “could have beens,” as well as deep discussions of what the primary sources say and what they mean. This volume plays a role in the larger discussion of what historians do, by asking historians to do something that seems outside the bounds of their normal work: to take their academic research, their immense knowledge of primary sources and secondary scholarship, and then to write something that adds in a dose of imagination to bring to life the historical actors that they are portraying. The part we play in this discussion, however, is the reality that this is actually not abnormal to the life of a historian. We often, it turns out, use our imagination to fill in the numerous gaps between the bits of information provided by the primary sources; typically we just call it conjecture. Depending upon the historian, this can be indicated in an academic text by saying clearly that “one can conjecture that” or rather more obtusely but much more commonly with the phrase “must have been.” “Must have been” phrases are a historian’s rhetorical device that translates into layman’s language as “I don’t have evidence for this, but I think it happened this way.” Though historians writing history, not imagined lives, are definitely writing non-fiction, they (we) are using our own knowledge of the life and times (contextual information), combined with the primary sources, and topped with a dash of imagination/conjecture to create the historical picture that we present in our monographs and articles.

I share these thoughts not as a way to undermine history, or historians’ credibility, but to explain how history and historians work, to fulfill the title of this conclusion by “pulling back the curtain” somewhat on the process of writing this volume and being a historian in general. It will also, I hope, add to the discussion about what historians do, how they work, and what tools are in their toolbox. These are tools that historians in training can also utilize as they develop their historical skills.

## Translation and reality

There is a base problem with teaching medieval history, of anywhere, to undergraduates and that is that the students typically lack the language experience to read sources in the original languages. It is the rare college freshman these days who comes in with either Greek or Latin, much less Old East Slavic! To remedy this, many of the sources have been translated into English, and it is those translations that are typically listed in the suggested readings section of each portrait. However,

here I would like to move beyond the translation of texts to address a greater, and even more difficult, issue: the translation of concepts and ideas.

As editors of this volume, Donald Ostrowski and I made a decision to allow the authors to utilize their own translations of terms, names, and concepts, rather than impose a uniform set upon them. The goal of this was to reflect the scholarly diversity inherent in how academics from a variety of places, studying different areas, think and write about the same topics. Sometimes these differences have at their root a basic disagreement over meaning, while at other times they are simply expressing different scholarly traditions of translation. Here, I will talk in some detail about one example – the title of the ruler of Rus' – to give examples of these differences as contained in the portraits in this volume.

There are several portraits in this volume that deal with Rus', and Rusians (the inhabitants of Rus'), whether from the earliest days of the Scandinavian explorations, the marriages of princesses and ruling of queens and kings, or their ecclesiastical history. The title of ruler in Rus' in the language of the time (Old East Slavic) was *kniaz'*. *Kniaz'* derives from the root \**kuningaz*, sharing that root with words in Old Norse (*konungr*), German (*konung*), Anglo-Saxon (*cyning*), and even English (king). How that word is translated and what that word means are separate, but deeply interrelated, conversations. The word means, at its root, ruler. And that is certainly one way that it can be translated. I typically translate it as that, as I have in my portrait here. However, the typical translation into English is “prince” as you will see in other portraits relating to Rus' here. To take the conversation a step further, I have argued elsewhere that the title should be translated not as prince, but as “king.”<sup>2</sup>

How can one word come to be translated as ruler, prince, and king (which is not to mention those who translate it as “duke”)? That gets us into the question of what the word means. In medieval Europe of the tenth through thirteenth centuries, there was a great deal of interaction between Rus' and the rest of Europe. The local, Russian, sources describe the ruler of Rus' and the rulers of the various cities of Rus' with the same title, *kniaz'*. When those rulers interacted with the rest of Europe, they appeared in sources written in other languages – and were called *konungr* in Old Norse and *rex* in Latin. This gives us some sense of a contemporary equivalency of titles, as perceived by the neighbors of Rus'.

Over the course of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries there was a growing disconnect between the new power center of northeastern Rus' – Muscovy – and the rest of Europe. When British traders arrived in Moscow in the sixteenth century, they found a court ruled by a *tsar'* and staffed by multiple *kniazia* (plural of *kniaz'*) who were members of the same family as the *tsar'* but were his subordinates. They translated this model of rulership onto their own and the ruler at the top became a king, or sometimes emperor, and the *kniazia* became dukes, and later princes. The use of these translations into English became common over the centuries of diplomatic interaction between the Anglophone world and the Russian one, such that when historians began writing about the medieval history of Eastern Europe they had at hand easy translations for titles such as *kniaz'*.

Where the problem arises is that though the translation of kniaz' as duke or prince is accurate for the sixteenth century, or perhaps a couple of centuries earlier, and certainly through to the present, it is not the correct translation for the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries. Scholars, though, have followed good practice and cited existing examples of translation to prove their point, thus creating even more examples of kniaz' being translated as prince. It is in this way that one word can be translated in many different ways, though each translation expresses a slightly different concept. Translating kniaz' as king is different from translating it as prince. The resulting impression of Rus' is also different.

Keeping all of this in mind, and part of the lesson of pulling back the curtain, it is important to consider the historical context not just for people and events, but words. Words and meanings too have their time and their place, as can be drawn from multiple modern examples, the most well-known being “awesome.” The King James Bible can use “awesome” to describe God’s might, but this is a different meaning than that used by Bart Simpson, or most anyone in the twenty-first century. Like so many things in history, context is everything.

## What is medieval Europe?

A casual perusal of the keywords “medieval Europe” in any college library catalog will turn up from dozens to hundreds to thousands of books with “medieval Europe” in the title. The vast majority of those books will be found to deal with only a small portion of medieval Europe, perhaps with a focus on England, France, and the papacy and their interactions with one another; the Vikings’ attacks on them; and their attacks on the Middle East. But despite the fact that the books have “medieval Europe” in the title, they leave out more than half of the continent.

On the other hand, works that deal with the medieval history of the rest of Europe, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Russia, and the Balkans, often exist inside national silos rather than as part of a broader horizontal framework of medieval history. And, I have found, it is quite impossible to write a book about this part of medieval Europe and call it *X in medieval Europe*. Reviewers and publishers tend to have strong objections along the lines of, “but you do not deal with *all* of medieval Europe, just the East.” If you have read the portraits in this volume, you will certainly understand the irony in such a complaint, having seen the impressive breadth of medieval European history just in this limited area that we have covered.

All of this is part of my goal to “pull back the curtain” on some of the editorial discussions and scholarly debates that went into the making of this volume. Students of history are historians in training, and they need to know that history is not cut and dried facts, but a process of understanding and creation of understandings of the past that fit the sources we have and our interpretations of them. A big part of this is scholarly discussions of frames of understanding; thus, “what is medieval Europe?” is actually a big question with multiple potential answers. For our purposes, though, I would like to talk particularly about only part of medieval Europe, the part we put into the title – medieval Eastern Europe.

## What is “Eastern Europe”?

Though popular culture and the news media use certain terms, like Eastern Europe, readily, they are more problematic among academics as well as among people who live in, or near, those areas.<sup>3</sup> Eastern Europe is a particularly fraught concept in modern politics, stemming most recently from the Cold War, but historically there have been concepts of Eastern Europe stretching back to the early modern period. From the Cold War period, Eastern Europe retained a legacy of Soviet influence – being non-Western in many ways including economically, culturally, and socially. The newly non-Communist states in that territory post-1991 worked diligently to define their future as explicitly *not* Eastern Europe. This new geopolitical reality led to an increasing use of new terminology to describe many of these areas. The term “Central Europe” in particular became quite popular, and has remained so, as a way for formerly Eastern European states such as Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, to shed their identity as “Eastern” and become not quite Western, but something other than “Eastern.”<sup>4</sup> Other scholars have not quite left behind “East” and adopted instead the term “East-Central Europe.” This is most popular with scholars working on southeastern Europe who also would like their polities to no longer be “Eastern” but recognize that it is not Western, or even quite Central Europe.<sup>5</sup> Left out of all of these formulations is a rather large part of Europe – Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia – which is rather the point in many cases. “Eastern” became identified with Russian, and with Russian and Soviet dominance, and thus there was a desire to break away from that influence and connection. However, if one follows this breakdown and accepts all of the labels, a progressive gradation of Europe has been created from the West (England and France), Central Europe (Germany, Poland, Hungary), East-Central Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, the Balkans), and then Eastern Europe (Russia and Ukraine). This seems overly complicated and overly divided for a relatively small continent.<sup>6</sup>

The real problem for our purposes as historians comes when these modern political rationales for territorial divisions are then read back into the past to create a medieval Central Europe, medieval East-Central Europe, etc. And this is where we return to a discussion of our volume. As I argued in my *Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World*, there was not a medieval Eastern Europe in the tenth through twelfth centuries. Rather, Rus' (which was not Russia, or Ukraine read back into time, but a medieval polity in its own right) was integrated with the rest of medieval Europe via dynastic marriages, religious connections, trade connections, and so on.<sup>7</sup> This is an important concept to take as a starting point, and can be expanded to other areas. Medieval Europe was deeply interconnected from Scandinavia in the north to the Italian peninsula in the south; from Byzantium in the east to France in the west.<sup>8</sup> Falsely dividing medieval Europe into regions, as is being done regarding modern Europe, does not serve to increase our understanding of what happened and why.

That said, given the above material about not being able to simply call this volume *Portraits of Medieval Europe* and exclude the western part of Europe, we had to make

a terminological choice. In this volume are portraits that deal with people from Scandinavia, the Baltic, eastern Europe, central Europe, and southeastern Europe including Byzantium. Stringing these together creates a rather unwieldy title that not only does not fit on a book jacket, but also is more confusing than enlightening. To avoid that, but also to ideally not increase confusion, we opted simply for medieval Eastern Europe. In my mind this best expressed the information that we wanted to convey to you – our audience. This book *is* about medieval Europe, even if the focus is on the eastern part of medieval Europe, broadly construed.

Ideally, this discussion of the choices made regarding terminology have explained rather than complicated the matter at hand. Beyond that, I hope that it has pulled back the curtain on some of the methodological issues that go into the construction of academic debates and the eventual publication process of academic work.

## Notes

- 1 John Tosh, with Seán Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Pearson, 2006 [Fourth Edition]), 194. There is much more here about postmodernism and its impact on history and historians as well, for those interested.
- 2 Christian Raffensperger, *The Kingdom of Rus'* (Kalamazoo, MI: ARC Medieval Press, 2017). There is a full discussion of the problems with translation and titlature here, which have only been very briefly summarized in this conclusion.
- 3 To add a wrinkle to this conversation for those especially interested – Eastern Europe with a capital “E” refers to the idea of Eastern Europe, and particularly the stereotyped ideas that are discussed above; while eastern Europe with a lowercase “e” refers to the geographic direction. In my recent work, I attempt to use the latter, eastern Europe, rather than the former, Eastern Europe, to describe the region with which I am working. That said, it is not easily possible to use a lowercase letter in the title to a book, which might have obviated the need for this digression.
- 4 There is an excellent discussion of the idea of Central Europe, as well as a justification of it, in Nora Berend, Przemysław Urbańczyk and Przemysław Wiszewski, *Central Europe in the High Middle Ages: Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, c. 900–c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), ch. 1.
- 5 See Florin Curta, ed., *East Central Europe and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).
- 6 And truth be told, Europe’s claim to the title of “continent” largely rests on the Greco-Roman associations of our modern academic systems of classification.
- 7 Christian Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
- 8 Though one should also note that there was no Byzantium or France in the Middle Ages. These modern labels are, again, anachronisms. Byzantium was the Roman Empire and was called such by its emperors and people, even if they spoke Greek. France was the kingdom of the Franks for much of medieval history, rather than a modern nation read back into the past. The same is true for polities throughout Europe. Thus, though the maps in this book are useful tools, even they bear some hint of this commonly accepted anachronism.