Ancient Civilizations Questions and Answers

Day 1

Q: In the course readings, the term “civilization” is often substituted by “culture.” Do these two terms have the same meaning?

A: The term “civilization” can be rather controversial and has raised large scholarly debate; moreover, through the ages, its meaning has been far from constant. The term “civilization” only came into general use in the English language in the late eighteenth century as an antithesis to barbarism (before then, “civility”—its Latin counterpart—was used). The term also helped to designate “civilized” people as superior to “uncivilized/barbaric” men. Thus, the term became a convenient tool in the period of European Imperialism as a justification for domination. Gradually through the twentieth century, the term definition shifted its meaning as to be the antithesis of “primitive” rather than “barbaric,” referring to a community’s complexity levels in terms of technology, science, and division of labor. Today in academia, the connotation of the term civilization is widened to include all kinds of human progress, and therefore it is often substituted by the term “culture.” Still, keep in mind its second meaning when reading a primary source or secondary source.

Q: Where is “the cradle of civilization?”

A: The actual location of “the cradle” is the subject of much scholarly debate. Throughout history, numerous regions have been assigned the title of “cradle of civilization.”

“The cradle of civilization” is a metaphorical epithet referring to any of the possible locations where civilization first began. Human history’s beginning, as opposed to its prehistory, has been said to begin with the discovery of agriculture, independently at several sites on Earth. Remember that agriculture was the key to the rise of sedentary communities, which nurtured the development of civilization. This creates a problem: where did agricultural societies first develop? The transition to agriculture occurred on an independent basis in several different regions of the world. Thus, most scholars believe that there is no single "cradle," but several independent developments of civilization. There are five regions which are commonly cited as being the possible sites for the “cradle of civilization:” the Near East (in particular the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers); Egypt (along the river Nile); India (along the Indus river); China (along the Huang-He-Yangtze river); and Mesoamerica and Andean South America. Traditionally, the title “cradle of civilization” has been applied to the Neolithic Ancient Near East, particularly the Fertile Crescent (Levant and Mesopotamia). Accordingly, scholars believed that agriculture was first practiced in the Fertile Crescent, and from there it eventually spread by influence throughout the world. Recent excavations have determined the error of this theory. In fact, the location of emergence of the basic features of civilization cannot be asserted. Subsequently, the modern academic community accepts all of the above mentioned locations are the possible “cradle of civilization.”

Day 2

Q: What were the main differences between the Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures?
A: The following table should answer this question to describe some main characteristics of each culture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paleolithic</th>
<th>Neolithic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time frame</strong></td>
<td>1.5 million BC to 8,000 BC</td>
<td>8,000 BC to 3,000 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human species</strong></td>
<td>Homo Erectus</td>
<td>Homo Sapiens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living patterns</strong></td>
<td>Nomadic</td>
<td>Semi-nomadic and/or sedentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life-style</strong></td>
<td>Hunting-gathering</td>
<td>Farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tools</strong></td>
<td>Chipped stone</td>
<td>Polished stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living structures</strong></td>
<td>Cave mouths and portable shelters and tents</td>
<td>Permanent structures (houses, and huts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Day 3**

**Q:** Are the “Neolithic Revolution” and the “Neolithic Agricultural Revolution” the same thing?

**A:** Yes. The Neolithic Revolution marked the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to agricultural societies. Neolithic peoples developed the technologies and systems for systematic agriculture, which brought about major economic, political, and social changes for these early sedentary communities. The Neolithic Revolution is therefore also called the Neolithic Agricultural Revolution.

**Q:** Were all effects of the “Neolithic Revolution” good?

**A:** Unfortunately, the Neolithic Revolution not only brought gains but also losses. Throughout this momentous time, marked by the development of sedentary societies, disease spread more rapidly than it had during Paleolithic hunter-gatherer period. Modern scholars point out two probable causes: lack of adequate sanitary facilities—leading to poor hygienic practices—and the tighter co-dependence between animals and humans.

Obviously, early sedentary communities lacked public health-related infrastructure. Rampant diseases originating from parasites, caused by the lack of adequate sanitary facilities and poor hygienic practices of the population, were major causes of food-borne disease outbreaks.

With the emergence of animal domestication, an intensification of the interaction of social and biological systems occurred, which resulted in a co-dependence between pathogens and humans, which may explain the rise in deaths and sickness following the Neolithic Revolution. Some examples of infectious diseases spread from animals to humans are influenza, smallpox, and measles.

**Day 6**

**Q:** What was the “Sumerian Renaissance?”

**A:** The “Sumerian Renaissance,” also known as the “Third Dynasty of Ur,” was a golden age in the Sumerian civilization (2100-2000 BC). This period marked a time of rebirth of Sumer, a renaissance of their previous greatness. At this time, Sumer not only became the preeminent
military power in Mesopotamia, but it was a period when commerce was restored, canals were dug, city walls were rebuilt, and agriculture was revived. It also represented a golden age of art in Sumerian civilization, particularly noted for its powerful architecture, as seen in palaces, temples, and ziggurats.

**Day 11**

**Q:** Do you know where the saying, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." originated?

**A:** Answers vary

**Q:** Could you subject yourself to live by those laws? Why or why not?

**A:** Answers vary

**Day 14**

**Q:** What is “Atenism?”

**A:** Atenism, also known as the Amarna heresy, was an anti-polytheistic theology focused around the god Aten and founded by pharaoh Amenhotep IV, in the 14\(^{th}\) century BC.

In Egyptian mythology, Aten was first mentioned in the Middle Kingdom as the sun disk, a part of god Re. Later on, under the reign of Tuthmosis IV (14\(^{th}\) century BC), Aten became a solar god. Pharaoh Amenhotep III (ca. 1386-1349 BC) established a separate cult for Aten. Amenhotep IV, later known as Akhenaten, turned the cult of the Aten unto a form of monotheism based on the worship of the sun, Aten. Atenism was Egypt’s official state religion for nearly twenty years, falling immediately after Amenhotep IV’s death.

Modern scholars believe that many of the beliefs promoted by Amenhotep IV were already present in earlier cults, particularly that of Amen-Re. Nevertheless, Akhenaten IV introduced one entirely new concept that was alien to traditional Egyptian religion, monotheism.

**Q:** What is the historical importance of the discovery of the Rosetta Stone?

**A:** The Rosetta Stone was ancient Egyptian stele (196 BC), now preserved at the British Museum. It was found by Pierre-Francois Bouchard, a French artillery officer, near the Rosetta mouth of the river Nile, in 1799. The importance of this stele comes from the fact that this slab of black basalt was inscribed with fragments of fourteen lines of hieroglyphics, thirty two lines of demotic—a type of ancient Egyptian script—and fifty four lines of Greek. In other words, since it presented the same text in all three scripts, it provided scholars with the key to decipher the hitherto untranslated Ancient Egyptian language. It was Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832), a French classical scholar and philologist, who in 1822 published the first translation of the Rosetta Stone. Thus, the translation of the Rosetta Stone changed Egyptology by enabling the world to finally decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs and to read the ancient Egyptian language.

**Q:** Were the Egyptians the only ancient civilization to practice mummification?
A: No. Deliberate mummification was practiced by many other ancient civilizations. For example, in South America, deliberate mummies are particularly abundant in Chile. It is in the Chilean Camarones region that we can find the oldest-known prepared mummies in the world, the “Chinchorro mummies,” dating from around 5000-3000 BC.

**Day 17**

Q: Did the people of the Kingdom of Kush share the same religious beliefs and practices as the Ancient Egyptians?

A: Yes, the Kingdom of Kush emerged ca. 1070 BC, after the disintegration of the Egyptian Empire. Thus, Kush inherited many of the cultural and religious characteristics of ancient Egypt. For example, the Kushites, like the ancient Egyptians, built pyramids and worshiped the Egyptian pantheon, headed by God Amun.

**Day 19**

Q: Where does the name “Minoan” come from? Does it have anything to do with the myth of the “Minotaur?”

A: Both names have the same origin: according to mythology, Minos, a Cretan king, ruled the Aegean Sea from his palace at Knossos. We do not know what the Minoans called themselves. The term “Minoan” was coined by English archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, who excavated Minos’s palace of Knossos, in the first half of the twentieth century.

It was in Minos’s palace at Knossos, where according to myth there was a labyrinth that housed Asterion, the “minotaur;” a monstrous creature—half man and half bull. He was the product of the union of Minos’s wife Pasiphae with a bull. Subsequently, the term “Minotaur” is a compound of the name “Mino,” referring to King Minos, and the noun “taur”—in Greek, meaning “bull.” Thus, the term “Minotaur” should translate into English as “Minos’s Bull.”

**Day 22**

Q: How does the current Jewish calendar relate to the chronology of the Hebrew Bible (or Christian Old Testament)?

A: Even though the current Hebrew calendar has only been in use for just over one thousand years, it owes its numbering system to the Hebrew Bible. The year numbers are based on the computations of dates and periods found in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the modern Hebrew calendar year numbering system counts years from the creation of the world; year 2448 AM (1476 BC) is the exodus from Egypt; and the year 2488 AM (1436 BC) marks the arrival of the Israelis to Canaan.

**Day 26**

Q: At its peak, how large was the area inhabited by the “Indus Valley Civilization?”
A: The Indus Valley Civilization emerged around the Indus River basin, and from there, it expanded to the Ghaggar-Hakra River valley and the land between the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers. At its peak, this civilization covered approximately half a million miles of the Northern Indian subcontinent, making it the largest ancient civilization in the world.

Day 27

Q: Why is the Indus Valley Civilization also known as the “Harappan” culture?

A: Harappa is the name of a village in Punjab, northeast Pakistan, and of the nearby archaeological site for the Bronze Age Indus Valley Civilization. Subsequently, this culture takes its name from the archaeological site, which takes its name from the village.

Day 28

Q: Was India the only country to have a “caste system”?

A: No. The caste system is a division of people into social groups (castes) in which all rights of each individual are pre-determined or ascribed by birth. In fact, social stratification is the product of a group’s will to separate itself from, and subjugate, other groups—a human conduct as old as man himself. Even though the caste system is usually associated with India and Aryan society, not even the word “caste” itself is of Indian origin but of Latin origin (castus = pure). Historically, numerous civilizations have had their societies based on a caste system, for example, feudal Japan in Asia and the Igbo nation in West Africa.

Day 30

Q: Was the Xia Dynasty really the first dynasty to rule China?

A: Yes. According to ancient sources, the Xia Dynasty (3rd-2nd centuries BC) was the first dynasty to rule China; however, according to these same texts, there were three sovereigns and five emperors who ruled China before the Xia dynasty. The difference is that these mythological rulers were not members of the same family; in other words, they were not a dynasty.

Q: What is The Records of the Grand Historian?

A: The Records of the Grand Historian is the English translation of the Chinese historical chronicle titled Shiji. This comprehensive history of China was started by Sima Tan, ca. 109 BC, by order of Emperor Wu of Han, and finished by his son, Sima Qian in 91 BC. Both were granted by the Emperor the title “Grand Historian,” thus the name of this magnificent work in English.

Comprising one hundred and thirty chapters in two volumes, it covers the history of China from the time of the Yellow Emperor (2600 BC) until Sima Qian’s own time. Because of its relative objectivity and heavy use of primary sources, at the time, its methodology became a model for later historians and chroniclers, such as Ban Biao and Ban Gu.

Day 33
Q: Why is the Zhou dynasty divided into Western and Eastern Zhou?

A: The reason for the division of the Zhou dynasty between Western and Eastern Zhou is the location of the capital of their empire. During the Western Zhou period (1046-771 BC) the capital was the western city of Haojing; however, after the city was sacked in 770 BC by Quanrong barbarians, the capital was moved to the east to Chengzhou. Remember that the Eastern Zhou Period (770-256 BC) is itself divided into the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period.

Day 39

Q: Did Confucius author any texts?

A: No. According to tradition, Confucius was believed to have written several texts; however, it is most probable that the texts, which were meant to contain Confucius’s teachings, such as the Analects, were created after his death. Still, some historians believe that it is possible that his disciples may have compiled his teachings while he was still alive, and thus, Confucius could have edited them. Even though modern historians cannot provide any evidence to prove whether Confucius authored or edited any of these texts, it is widely accepted that the guiding principles contained in them do comprise the Confucian beliefs.

Q: Was Confucianism ever an official religion of China?

A: Yes. Confucianism was the official religion of China between the raise to power of the Han Dynasty in the second century BC and 1912, with the establishment of the Republic of China.

Day 41

Q: Who was Laozi?

A: Actually, the term Laozi (in Chinese “Old Saint”) refers to a person and a book. Laozi is the name given to Li Er, an ancient Chinese philosopher, who lived in the 7th century BC under the Zhou dynasty. He is regarded as the “father of Taoism.” His book, Tao Te Ching (The Way of the Tao), is also often referred to as the Laozi.

Q: What are the “Three Jewels of the Tao?”

A: The “Three Jewels of the Tao” are the basic concepts for Taoist ethics that appear in Laozi’s Tao Te Ching: compassion, moderation, and humility. These three precepts were described by Laozi in the Tao Te Ching as the practical rules for enlightenment –the comprehension of nature and the world.

Day 44

Q: When was the Great Wall of China built?

A: The original Great Wall of China was built by the Qin Dynasty in the 3rd century BC. This great fortification was ordered by Emperor Qin Shi Huang (259-210 BC) to protect the northern
borders of his empire against nomadic groups, particularly the Mongols. The Wall has been expanded and rebuilt in several occasions, particularly during the Ming Dynasty (14th-17th centuries AD). Remember that many of China’s most memorable monuments, including the Terracotta Army, were built during the Qin Dynasty.

Q: Where does the name “Warring State Period” come from?

A: The Warring States Period (ca. 475–221 BC) owes its name to the fact that during this era, China was divided into seven small states: Qin, Chu, Qi, Yan, Han, Wei, and Zhao. By the end of the period two states, Qin and Chu, eventually defeated all the other states; however, in 221 BC, the Qin emerged supreme and established the first unified Chinese Empire. The term was coined by the ancient chronicle Zhan Guo Ce (“Strategies of the Warring States”) compiled between the 3rd and the 1st century BC, afterwards, the term was here to stay.

Q: What is “legalism?”

A: Legalism is a doctrine or ideology developed during the Warring States Period, and it advocates order and law as the most important principles to govern states. Scholars describe legalism as a pragmatic rather than philosophical doctrine, because it focuses in the art and practice of ruling, rather than in the contemplation of metaphysical matters. Its most important figure was Shang Yang, a statesman during the Warring States Period who assisted the Qin dynasty to centralize their kingdom; a political and economic measure that greatly helped the Qin to be able to unify China in 221 BC.

Q: Who was the “First Emperor” of China?

A: According to Sima Qian’s The Records of the Grand Historian, the “First Emperor” (or “Commencing Emperor”) of China was Qin Shi Huang (259-210 BC). He was the creator of the first unified Chinese Empire (221-210 BC). Moreover, he ordered the creation of the Great Wall of China.

Day 46

Q: From the fall of the Qin Dynasty, how long did it take for the Han Dynasty to unify China again?

A: The Qin dynasty ruled a unified Chinese empire from 221 to 206 BC. The collapse of the Qin dynasty led to the fragmentation of China into several small kingdoms. For years, two main families competed for the title of emperor, the Chu (represented by Xiang Yu) and the Han (represented by Liu Bang). Finally, in the Battle of Gaixia (202 BC), the Han defeated the Chu, and Liu Bang became the new emperor. Subsequently, it only took the Han dynasty 4 years to unify China once again after the fall of the Qin dynasty.

Q: Why is the Han Dynasty divided into Western and Eastern Han?

A: The rule of the Han Dynasty lasted over four centuries, and it divided in two periods: Western Han (206 BC-9 AD) and Eastern Han (25-220 AD). As you can see, there is a period of six years of interregnum; this is due to the usurpation of power by Wang Man of the Xin Dynasty. The
names Western and Eastern come from the fact that during the first part of the Han period, the capital was in western city of Guanzhong, and in the second part of the Han period, the capital was moved to the Eastern city of Guandong.

Day 56

Q: Was Athens the only polis of ancient Greece?

A: No. The term polis is usually translated in English as “city-state;” however, it has two dimensions: it refers to an urban settlement, but it can also describe a political community. In any case, not only Athens, but also Sparta, Thebes, Corinth, and Argos among many others were considered to be poleis.

Q: What was the significance of the Battle of Leuctra?

A: Historically, the Battle of Leuctra (371 BC) marks the end of Sparta’s military supremacy after being beaten by a much smaller Theban army. However, this battle’s real importance lays on the fact that it revolutionized warfare, opening a new era in the military arts. Before this battle, Greek armies were arranged in an echelon formation with the infantry in the center, usually twelve men deep, and cavalry on the sides. In the Battle of Leuctra, realizing that he had a smaller force, Epaminondas—the Theban commander—arranged his troops by using an entirely new principle. He drew the best Theban warriors to the left wing, arranging them in parallel lines of fifty men in depth. The center and right wings were eight men deep. The Spartan army drew up twelve men deep. Thus, when both forces collided, even though the Theban army was smaller, the concentration of most of its strength on the left broke the enemy’s lines, throwing them into disorder. This was the first time in history that the principle of local superiority by attacking upon a single point of the enemy lines was used.

Day 57

Q: Was Socrates the only philosopher in Classical Greece to be persecuted because of his ideas?

A: No. Even though, as far as we know today, Socrates was the only philosopher to be executed because of his ideas, many others were charged with similar crimes and had to flee into exile, including Anaxagoras and Protagoras.

For a short period of time in 5th century BC, there was an impiety law by which any irreverence toward the gods or sacred things would result in persecution, punishable by exile and even death.

Day 61

Q: Who killed Philip II of Macedon?

A: Philip II of Macedon died in October 336 BC by the hand of Pausanias, one of his bodyguards. The real question is: who paid Pausanias of Orestis to kill King Philip II?

Who was behind the king’s murder has been an extremely controversial subject since ancient times. The earliest account of the event is that of Greek philosopher Aristotle, who since 342 BC
had been Alexander’s personal tutor. Aristotle attributed Philip’s murder to motives of private revenge on the part of Pausanias. Decades later, Cleitarchus, in his History of Alexander (c.310 BC), claimed that Pausanias had been a lover of Philip’s, but became jealous after the King left him for a younger partner. Pausanias’ taunting of Philip’s new lover led him to commit suicide. Attalus, Philip’s father-in-law, decided to take revenge by sexually assaulting Pausanias. Thus, after Philip refused to punish Attalus for his crime, Pausanias decided to kill the King to avenge his damaged honor.

In Historiarum Philippicarum, Roman historian, Justin, suggested Alexander and his mother’s (Olympias of Epirus) implication in Philip’s death. According to Justin, Olympias and Alexander’s actions after Pausanias’ capture and assassination were proof of their guilt. Olympias publicly honored Pausanias by ordering annual sacrifices in his memory, and soon after obtaining the throne, Alexander ordered Attalus’ execution. However, modern scholarship points out how Olympias’ sympathy of Pausanias is hardly proof of her possible involvement, and Alexander’s order could have simply been part of the inevitable purging of enemies.

Unfortunately, still today there is no consensus over who “ordered” the assassination of Philip II of Macedon. On one hand, it is rather improbable that Pausanias would have acted alone, but on the other hand, there is no proof of Alexander and his mother’s complicity in the murder.

Q: Is it true that Alexander the Great’s childhood hero was Achilles? If so, how did this affect his military career?

A: Yes, the Iliad was Alexander’s favorite reading, and Achilles was his childhood hero. Curiously, Alexander believed they were related through his mother, Olympias, who counted Achilles among her ancestors. Unfortunately, still today we cannot confirm their kinship. Anyway, according to mythology, Achilles was the greatest warrior of his time, and for Alexander, he became the measure against whom he compared himself.

Roman author Claudius Aelianus wrote of Alexander's visit to Troy where "Alexander garlanded the tomb of Achilles." Although Alexander’s admiration of Achilles is clear, scholars are still today wondering if Alexander really thought of himself as a second Achilles.

Q: Who were the “Diadochi?”

A: The Diadochi or “successors” were the Macedonian kings who succeeded to the different parts of Alexander the Great’s dismembered empire. These successors were the generals of Alexander, who after his death in 323 BC, fought the “Wars of the Diadochi,” a savage conflict which lasted forty years (322-275 BC). At the end, Alexander’s empire was divided into four kingdoms: Macedonia for Antigonus; Asia for Seleucus; Anatolia for Philetaerus; and Egypt for Ptolemy.

Q: How are Alexander the Great and Queen Cleopatra connected?

A: Famous Egyptian Queen Cleopatra (Cleopatra VII) was a member of the Ptolemaic Dynasty. The Ptolemaic Dynasty was founded by Ptolemy. If you remember, Ptolemy was a member of Alexander the Great’s army and the Diadochi (successor), who declared himself King of Egypt after Alexander’s death.
Day 62

Q: What is the difference between the terms “Hellenic” and “Hellenistic?”

A: Conventionally, scholars use the term “Hellenic” to refer to “pure” Greek culture; while the term “Hellenistic” is used to designate the mixed Greek culture created by its contacts with other cultural groups, such as the Macedonian, that developed in the various parts of the eastern Mediterranean particularly after Alexander the Great’s conquest.

Day 64

Q: Who were the most influential philosophers of the Hellenistic period?

A: Hellenistic philosophy developed after Aristotle and ended with the revival of interest in Plato (Neoplatonism) in the first century BC. The main philosophical schools of thought were Phytagoreanism, represented by its founder Pythagoras; Sophism by Protagoras; Cynicism by Antisthenes; Cyrenaicism by Aristippus of Cyrene; Skepticism by Pyrrho; Stoicism, by Zeno of Citium; Epicureanism by Epicurus; Eclecticism by Cicero; Hellenistic Judaism by Philo of Alexandria; Hellenistic Christianity by Clement of Alexandria; and finally Neoplatonism by Plotinus.

Day 66

Answers to the 11 Study Questions


Day 90

Q: Did the Etruscans speak Latin?

A: No, although the Etruscan civilization is considered as the precursor culture to Ancient Rome, the Etruscans did not speak Latin. In fact, Latin developed in Latium, in central western Italy, as a descendant of the Proto-Indo-European language, from the Italic language family. The Etruscans had their own language, a non-Indo-European language, probably related to the Tyrsenian language family. Etruscan and Latin co-existed in the Italian peninsula for a few centuries, and even some Etruscan words entered the Latin language, such as the word Rome itself. Finally, Etruscan became extinct in the 1st century AD, after being completely superseded by Latin. Unfortunately, very few documents in Etruscan have survived to our time. Thus, modern scholarship still has a rather limited knowledge of the Etruscan language.

Day 92

Q: Is it true that modern historians consider the Gracchi Dynasty as the founders of socialism?

A: Yes, the two representatives of the Gracchi dynasty in the 2nd century BC, Tiberius and Gaius Sempronius Gracchi, are considered to be founding fathers of both socialism and populism.
These two reformist politicians attempted to pass land and social reforms that would have filled up the chasm between the patricians and the plebeians. Both brothers were murdered by members of the Roman Senate for their reformative policies, Tiberius in 133 BC and Gaius in 121 BC.

**Day 93**

**Q:** What did the Romans use the Forum for?

**A:** We will start by pointing out that the word forum means market; subsequently, the Roman forum was the market-place, which soon lost its primitive use and became the center of Roman public life. During the Roman Republic, it was the venue for citizens to gather for civic meetings, which included public speeches, elections, and criminal trials.

**Q:** How did an individual become a slave in ancient Rome?

**A:** In ancient Rome, there were many ways in which an individual could become a slave. Firstly, most slaves were acquired through war. They were the enemy soldiers and civilians—spoils of war which Roman soldiers could sell or dispose of as they pleased. Another common way in which an individual could become a slave was through debt-bondage. People could sell members of their household to the debtor. Curiously, it was illegal for individuals to sell themselves into slavery as this could lead to fraud.

Children were particularly vulnerable to slavery. Parents could sell their children into slavery as a way to raise funds; orphans were usually collected and raised as slaves. Moreover, children born of a slave were themselves slaves.

Remember that modern scholarship emphasizes the fact that Roman slavery was not based on racial superiority, but it derived as we have seen from economic forces. However, as in every other type of slavery, masters had unrestricted rule over their slaves.

**Day 94**

Answers to the 10 Study Questions

[Link](http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HIST101-Subunit-6.2.4-Reading-Guide-for-Ovids-Metamorphases-Final.pdf)

**Day 103**

**Q:** Why was the title “Caesar” always added to the name of the Roman emperors?

**A:** Caesar was a title of honor bestowed upon Roman emperors. It derives from the name of Julius Caesar, the first Roman emperor. Thus, the name “Caesar” is an honorific generic title, which in the eyes of the Romans endowed their bearers with the characteristics of their revered first emperor.

**Q:** Did Julius Caesar really say “Veni, Vidi, Vici”?
A: Yes. “Veni, vidi, vici” (“I came, I saw, I conquered!”) was the message sent by Julius Caesar to the Roman Senate after his victory in the Battle of Zela (northern Turkey) over King Pharnaces II of Pontus in 47 BC. This phrase has come to represent Julius Caesar’s pragmatism as a military leader and an emperor.

Q: What was the “Pax Romana”?

A: The Pax Romana, or Roman Peace, was a period of relative calm experienced by the Roman Empire, from the reign of Cesar Augustus at the beginning of the 1st century AD to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, at the end of the 2nd century AD. Lasting for over two hundred years, the Pax Romana was considered a time of prosperity and a golden age of Roman culture.

Day 104

Q: Who were the “Apostolic Fathers”?

A: The “Apostolic Fathers” were early Christian writers (1st and 2nd centuries AD), whose works are an important reflection of the doctrines and practices of the early Church. They were supposed to have been acquainted with one or more of the twelve apostles; however, they were not apostles themselves, thus their works do not form part of the New Testament. Traditionally, there were five Apostolic Fathers: Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, the Shepherd of Hermas, and Barnabas. However, some sources add Papias of Hierapolis to this group. Historically, their importance was as witnesses to the development of the early Christian Church.

Q: Who caused the Great Fire of Rome?

A: According to ancient sources there are two possible perpetrators: Emperor Nero and members of the Roman Christian community. When the fire broke out, Emperor Nero cast blame on the Christians as the arsonists. However, Roman historian Suetonius accused Emperor Nero, claiming he played the lyre and sang the “Sack of Ilium,” a Greek epic poem, while admiring the fire. The controversy deepened when Roman Senator and historian, Publius Tacitus, stated that the emperor was in the southern Roman province of Antium when the fire broke out. Still, Tacitus did point out that some Roman citizens did hold the emperor responsible, so Nero, to diffuse blame organized a relief effort to help those affected by the fire. In any case, scholars today still cannot prove whether the fire was accidental, caused by Nero, or by Christians.

Day 106

Q: Why did Roman Emperor Constantine I convert to Christianity?

A: This is a very difficult question, which scholars are probably never going to be able to answer, because they cannot directly ask Emperor Constantine to clarify his reasons for converting to Christianity. However, there are several theories that may explain his actions.

Constantine’s mother, Helena, converted to Christianity after being repudiated by her husband and Constantine’s father, Roman Emperor Constantius I. According to tradition, Helena was a devoted Christian, who even carried out a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Constantine had a very close
relationship with his mother; not only did he restore her imperial dignity after becoming emperor, but when she died, he renamed her native town “Helenopolis” (The city of Helena) in her honor. Thus, some have argued that he adopted Christianity because of his mother’s influence. However, although Constantine was exposed to Christianity by his mother for a long period of time, he was more than 42 years old when he was baptized.

According to ancient Christian sources, Constantine’s conversion was the result of a miraculous vision he had during the Battle of Milvian Bridge (312 AD). During this battle, Constantine was said to have seen a cross in a sky before his victory. A year later, when he became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire, he issued the Edict of Milan, which legalized Christian worship.

Even though we will probably never know when and why exactly Constantine converted to Christianity, most scholars do agree that Constantine was a devoted Christian.

**Day 110**

**Q:** Is it true that the Mauryan Empire was the largest empire ever to exist in the Indian subcontinent?

**A:** Yes, at the height of its power, the Mauryan Empire included most of north and central India, large parts of south India, and parts of modern Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. It covered a total area of nearly 2 million sq miles (5 million sq km), which makes it the largest empire to ever exist in the Indian subcontinent.

**Day 112**

**Q:** Was Buddha a real person?

**A:** Yes. His name was Siddhārtha Gautama, a spiritual teacher who, without knowing it, would create the world’s fourth largest religion. Siddhārtha Gautama was born ca. 565 BC to the king of the Shakya tribe—King Suddhodana—in northeast India (now Nepal). Ancient records offer numerous details of the physical appearance and upbringing of Buddha. For example, we know that he had blue eyes and a muscular body—thanks to his military training. According to tradition, at the age of twenty-nine, he abandoned his kingdom, renouncing his princely life. Siddhārtha became a wanderer, travelling across India, teaching his precepts along the way freely to anyone who would listen. During his life, he endured numerous self-purification rituals, which took a great toll on his body. He died ca. 486 BC in Kushinagar, in northern India.

**Q:** Do all Buddhists believe in reincarnation?

**A:** No. Firstly, Buddhists do not like to use the term “reincarnation,” they prefer “rebirth.” Reincarnation implies the existence of an entity or soul which can travel from a creature to another after death; a concept that clashes with the Buddhists’ belief in *anatman*—a doctrine that states that there is no-self or such thing as a soul. Nevertheless, there are several branches of Buddhism that do not include the doctrine of “rebirth” among their teachings, as for example the Shin Buddhists.

**Day 114**
Q: Why is the period of the Gupta Empire considered the Golden Age of Ancient India?

A: The Gupta dynasty turned a kingdom into an empire, which covered most of the Indian subcontinent continent. Trade and commerce flourished through the movement of goods and people (mostly pilgrims) along China, Southeast Asia, and the Mediterranean. This economic prosperity led to the creation of outstanding works of art, which was characterized by its lack of foreign influence. Gupta scholars made major contributions in science, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, literature, and philosophy. Moreover, this was a period of relative religious tolerance, which led to a revival of Hinduism, during which many of the traditional aspects of Hindu culture emerged.

Day 115

Q: Is it true that the game of chess was invented in India during the Gupta Empire?

A: Yes. The game of chess originated in India during the Gupta dynasty. In its early form, it was a four-player war game called “chaturanga” (“army of four divisions” or “four corps”). The different pieces represented the key features of the Indian armies of the time: infantry, cavalry, elephants, and chariots. According to ancient Arabic sources, it spread first to Persia and then to Asia and Europe through the Silk Road.

Q: What were the “nine gems” of the Gupta Empire?

A: Actually, the right question should be “Who were the nine gems of the Gupta Empire?”

According to tradition, the nine gems (Navratnas) of the Gupta Empire were nine erudite individuals who formed part of India’s legendary Emperor Vikramaditya’s court. These nine extraordinary men were: Kalidas, a Sanskrit poet and dramatist, who is considered the greatest writer in Indian history; Vetala Bhatta, an Hindu philosopher; Varahamihira, an eminent scientist who authored the famous astronomical compendium Pancha-siddhantika (Five Treatises); Vararuchi (also known as Katyayana), author of the Sarvanukramani, a compendium of Vedic hymns; Amara Simhan, a poet and author of the Amara-Kosha, a thesaurus of Sanskrit; Shanku, an architect; Dhanvantari, a physician; Kshapanaka, an astrologer; and Vaitalika, a magician.

Day 124

Q: Is it true that the Olmecs invented the concept of zero?

A: No. Archaeological evidence tells us that the Olmecs were probably the first civilization of the Americas to use zero. However, the honor of being the first civilization to discover the concept of number zero belongs to Indian scholars of the 9th century. Nevertheless, remember that Babylonian and ancient Greek thinkers had already investigated and philosophized about the possible existence and nature of this number.

Day 125

Q: What happened to the great city of Tenochtitlan after the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire?
A: Soon after the Aztecs surrendered to the Spanish, Hernán Cortés ordered the destruction of the capital city. All its buildings were reduced to ruins and the city was leveled. The city was rebuilt by order of Hernán Cortés as the capital of the Spanish colonial empire, Mexico City.

Q: Does the archaeological site of Teotihuacan contain the largest pyramid in pre-Columbian America?

A: No, the largest pyramid in pre-Columbia America is the Great Pyramid of Cholula, in central Mexico. In fact, this structure is the largest pyramid in the world (even larger that the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt). With a base that takes up 45 acres, the pyramid stands 180 ft (55 meters) tall and contains over 4 million cubic yards of material.

Day 127

Q: Were the Toltecs the only civilization to speak Nahuatl?

A: No. Many of the pre-Columbian civilizations were of Nahua ethnicity and subsequently spoke Nahuatl dialects. For example, the Tepaneca, Acolhua, Tlaxcaltec, Xochimilca, and even the Aztec cultures spoke Nahuatl.

Day 128

Q: How long did it take for Spain to conquer the Mayan Empire?

A: The Spanish conquistadors first encountered the Mayans in 1511; however, they did not attempt to conquer the Mayan Empire until 1527. After several campaigns, the Spanish king declared the conquest officially complete in 1546; however, revolts continued until 1697, when a Spanish force finally subdued the last Mayan independent states. Thus, it took 170 years for Spain to conquer the Mayan Empire.

Q: Why did so many pre-Columbian civilizations venerate jaguars?

A: Firstly, I would like to point out that jaguars are only native to the Americas. Obviously, this is why you will not find references to it in any ancient civilizations in Europe, Africa, or Asia. In pre-Columbian America, the jaguar was a symbol of power, identified with gods and rulers. It is rather probable that its role as an emblem of power derived from its position on top of the food chain as the largest and strongest of the predators of the New World.

Jaguars were often used to represent deities. For example, Tezcatlipoca, the central deity of the Aztec civilization, was represented by a jaguar. In Maya mythology, the jaguar was a symbol associated with the god of war, particularly in the narrative of the hero twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Rulers often added the term “jaguar” to their names. For example, King Yaxum B’alam III of the Yaxchilan (7th century AD) was also known as the “Bird-Jaguar,” and King Itzamnaaj B’alam II (8th century AD) was known as the “Shield-Jaguar” because of the pictographs used to represent these kings.

Whether used as an avatar or a symbol for gods and rulers, jaguars were a powerful image associated with natural and supernatural strength and ascendancy in pre-Columbian civilizations.
Day 129

Q: What is the “Gateway of the Sun?”

A: The “Gateway of the Sun” is a solid stone gate built by the Tiwanaku culture ca. 400 AD. This megalithic structure, cut from a single boulder measuring 10 ft tall by 13 ft wide (3 x 4 meters), is one of the most beautiful and enigmatic pre-Columbian monuments.

Its lintel contains a complex carved composition, in which a large frontal central figure is surrounded by 48 smaller figures in profile—32 effigies with human heads and 16 with bird heads. The central figure, which is surrounded by what archaeologists have described as “rays” or “thunder,” is believed to represent a Tiwanakan deity, probably the Creator/Sun God or Weather God. The back of the monument is rather different from the front, which has led some to believe that they may have been carved at different times. The gateway’s reverse is decorated with carvings with similar designs to those exhibited at Puma-Punku. It is probable that this monument was originally painted and inlaid with gold.

Most scholars believe that the gate served a calendric purpose, due to the engravings of astronomical nature that decorate it. Some claim the Gate of the Sun forms an astronomical observation unit when combined with the Kalassasaya—another large stone structure built by the Tiwanaku (ca. 200 AD), which marks orientation relative to the cardinal directions. Still, others believe it represents of Tiwanaku’s hierarchical political and social organization.

Day 135

Q: According to the Qur’an, how many prophets of Islam are there?

A: According to the Qur’an, there are 25 prophets sent by God, which include Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Jesus.

Q: What are the five pillars of Islam?


The “Testimony of Faith” (or Shahadah) is to state one’s belief in the truth of Islam, in other words, accepting Muhammad as God’s prophet. The testimony of faith is a statement (“I testify that there is no God but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”) is recited during prayer.

Prayer (or Salah) in Islam consists of the daily acts of worship in which Muslims can communicate with Allah. Muslims pray five times a day, facing the direction of Mecca, the holiest city in Islam (Mecca is the birthplace of Muhammad and where the Quran was composed). The five daily prayers are: Fajr (morning prayer) to take place from between first light of day to sunrise; Duhur (noon prayer) from when the sun is highest until it is half way between that point and the horizon; Asr (mid-afternoon prayer) from when the sun is half way between its zenith and the horizon until sunset; Maghrib (evening prayer) from sunset until dark; and Isha (night prayer) from dark until midnight or the first light of day. The prayers have to be
recited in Arabic (even by those whose first language is not Arabic, or do not speak Arabic).

Fasting (or Saum) during the holy month of Ramadan—the ninth month of the Muslim calendar—is the third of the pillars of Islam. The month of Ramadan is the time when the Quran was revealed to Muhammad. Muslims fast during this month from sunrise to sunset.

Alms-giving (or Zakah) is obligatory charity. All Muslims must give part of their income to the mosque for distribution to the poor. Obviously, the alms-giving is obligatory only for those who can afford it.

Pilgrimage (or Hajj) is the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca that every Muslim must perform at least once in his life.

**Day 137**

**Q:** Where does Sharia derive from?

**A:** Sharia, or Islamic law, derives mainly from three religious sources: the Quran; accounts of the life of Muhammad; and when these two sources do not address a particular subject, jurisprudence calls for ijma, or consensus by religious scholars.

**Day 139**

**Q:** How was the Umayyad Dynasty related to Islamic prophet Muhammad?

**A:** In tradition, the Umayyads and Prophet Muhammad are indeed related, being different clans of the same tribe—the Quraysh. Ancient records tell us both were descendants of Abd Manaf ibn Qusai, who lived in the city Mecca in the 5th century AD. Abd Manaf had two twin sons: Abd-Shams, ancestor of the Umayyads; and Hashim, ancestor of Prophet Muhammad and of the Abbasid dynasty.

**Q:** At its peak, what was the extent of the Umayyad Caliphate?

**A:** From their capital at Damascus, the Umayyads ruled over an empire which covered over five million square miles (13,000,000 sq. km). Their empire, which extended from Spain to India, was the fifth largest contiguous empire to ever exist.

**Q:** When did the Sunni-Shi’a Split end?

**A:** It still has not ended. Islam had its greatest schism after the death of Muhammad in 632 AD, when a dispute over the succession to the prophet in the caliphate led to the emergence of two opposing groups: the Sunni and the Shia. Even though fourteen centuries have elapsed since then, this controversy spread across the world and is still as bitter as it was then.

**Day 140**

**Q:** How was the Abbasid Dynasty related to Islamic prophet Muhammad?
A: The members of the Abbasid Dynasty were descendants of Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, the youngest uncle of Muhammad.

**Day 141**

Q: Why is Alhazen such an important figure in the history of science?

A: Because of his development of scientific method. Alhazen (Ibn al-Haytham) has been called the “father of science” and the “first scientist” for his work of empirical observation. Alhazen created a scientific method based on the procedures of observation, contrasting, and experimentation, which revolutionized science and became the base for modern scientific methodology.

**Day 146**

Q: Was the medieval Kingdom of Ghana located in the same place as today’s Republic of Ghana?

A: No. Even though both are located in West Africa, and they share the name, Ghana (Warrior King), the medieval Kingdom was nearly 500 miles (800 km) north from the modern Republic of Ghana. The Kingdom of Ghana was located between the Sahara to the north and the Savanna region to the south, while the modern Republic of Ghana is located between Burkina Faso to the north and the Gulf of Guinea to the south.

**Day 148**

Q: Why is Northwestern Africa called the Maghreb?

A: The term Maghreb in Arabic means “west” and describes the western territories of North Africa, which fell to the Islamic conquest of the 7th century. Why use the term “Maghreb” instead of “Northwest Africa?” Maghreb describes the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania, and excludes Egypt, while “North Africa” includes Egypt, which is culturally and historically distinct from the rest of northwest Africa.

The term is also transliterated as Magreb, Mughrib, Maghrib, and Magrib. Still, Maghreb is the most common.

**Day 149**

Q: Who ruled the Hausa Kingdoms?

A: Even though the Hausa Kingdoms were semi-independent city states, they were ruled by a single emir. However, each city-state was governed by a chief, usually a blood relative of the emir.

**Day 150**

Q: What was the official religion of the Songhai Empire?
A: Islam. In fact, the Songhai Empire (fl. 15th – 16th century) was one of the largest Islamic empires in the history of Africa.

Day 151

Q: Who are the Swahili?

A: Defining who the Swahili are is a rather problematic question. The Swahilis are not a tribe, nor have they ever been the inhabitants of a unified nation. The Swahili are Bantu people who live in the coastal regions and offshore islands of Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique. Ethnically, the Swahili are of mixed black, Arab, and Persian descent. They speak Kiswahili, even though this Bantu language is not restricted to them alone, since traders spread it all over eastern and central Africa.

Q: Which civilizations have influenced Swahili culture?

A: The Swahili culture is a mixture of African Bantu, Middle Eastern, Arab, European, and Asian cultures. The diversity of its culture is due to its history. Since antiquity, European traders, particularly Greco-Roman, had visited the wealthy coasts of East Africa in hopes to exchange their goods for ivory and gold among many other riches. Some elements of their culture were adopted by the local Bantu peoples. However, Swahili culture began to take form around the 8th century, as a consequence of the inclusion of east coast of Africa as part of the Indian Ocean trading network by Arab traders. This led to the formation of an Afro-Arabic or Swahili culture. This new culture was further enriched in period between the 10th to the 15th century, which saw an increment in the contacts and mixing between the native Bantu and Arab, Persian, and Far Eastern traders.

Day 152

Q: Where was the Benin Empire located?

A: The Benin Empire was located in modern day Nigeria, from Lagos to a large part of the western Igbo country. Also, according to Edo oral tradition, large parts of Igbo, Anambra, Imo Abia, and the Rivers states formed part of the Benin Kingdom and to the later empire.

Remember not to confuse the Benin Empire (1440-1897) with the present-day Republic of Benin in West Africa, which became independent from France in 1960 (before independence it was known as Dahomey). Curiously, the Republic of Benin was named after the Bight of Benin, which it borders to the East; the Bight of Benin had been named after the Benin Empire, which it bordered to the East.

Day 153

Q: What was the “Accidental Crusade?”

A: The “Accidental Crusade” was the result of the first attempt by the Jesuits to establish a mission in South Africa. In 1560, Father Gonçalo da Silveira arrived in Mozambique, where he began to evangelize. A year later, in 1561, he moved northwards, reaching the lands of the
Mwene Mutapa (modern day Zimbabwe). There, he managed to convert the chief and many of the members of the tribe to Christianity. According to tradition, a Muslim merchant convinced the Mwene Mutapa that the Jesuit had been sent by the King of Portugal to scout the land before a Portuguese invasion to take control of the gold mines. Once the word spread through the tribe, the Mwene Mutapa killed the Jesuit Father.

In vengeance, in 1569, Portugal launched the “Accidental Crusade,” an expedition headed by Francisco Barreto. His orders were to expel all Muslims from east central Africa and to seize the gold mines of the region. Due to foul weather and disease, they only managed to get as far as upper Zambezi. While they did not fully manage to achieve their objectives, Barreto’s forces massacred numerous Muslim trading expeditions.

**Day 160**

**Q:** Who founded the city of Constantinople, and what is the origin of the city’s name?

**A:** This is a trick question. The city was founded by Greek merchants in the 7th century BC under the name Byzantium (probably derived from the name Byzas, a legendary Greek leader and colonist). In the 4th century AD, Roman Emperor Constantine I rebuilt the city of Byzantium and re-named it Constantinopolis (“Constantine’s City” or Constantinople in English). Curiously, Constantine also attempted to call the city “Nea Roma” (New Rome) to no avail. Constantinople remained the official name of the city until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, when the name of Istanbul—deriving from the Medieval Greek phrase “Is Tim ‘Bolin” meaning “in the city”—was established.

**Day 161**

**Q:** What is the historical importance of the Edict of Milan?

**A:** The Edict of Milan was a proclamation signed by Roman Emperors Constantine I and Licinius that established religious toleration within the Roman Empire. Signed in Milan in February of 313 AD, this edict of toleration was the first document in history to openly support religious freedom within an empire. This letter is of particular importance for Christianity, since it ended Christian persecution, restored Christian rights, and allowed the spread of Christianity without violence.

**Q:** What were the consequences of the Fourth Crusade for the Byzantine Empire?

**A:** The Fourth Crusade (1202–1204 AD) was a tremendous disaster for the Byzantine Empire. Originally intended to conquer Muslim-controlled Jerusalem, the Fourth Crusade led to the conquest of Constantinople by the crusaders. This led to the dissolution of the Empire into competing Byzantine and Latin states. It also contributed to the acrimony between the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church, which had parted ways in 1054 with a declaration of a formal schism between the two churches, which remains in place to the present day.

**Q:** The Byzantine Empire had military altercations with how many Eastern powers?
A: The Byzantine Empire lasted for nearly 1000 years—a time during which it was under constant attack from Persians, Arabs, Seljuk Turks, and Ottomans. In fact, it fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 AD.

Day 163

Q: What were the main effects of the Byzantine-Arab Wars?

A: Modern historiography believes the Byzantine-Arab Wars had three main consequences. Firstly, they were considered to have led to the rise of Charlemagne in the 8th century. Secondly, they acted as a stimulus to feudalism by providing the conditions that developed economic self-sufficiency in Medieval Europe. Thirdly, these conflicts highly contributed to put a strain in the already damaged relationship between Rome and Byzantium. Relations between East and West had long been embittered by political and religious differences; however, it has been argue that the Iconoclastic controversy of the 8 and 9th centuries—an indirect product of the Byzantine-Arab Wars—was one of the most important strains to the growing estrangement between the Byzantine Empire and the Papacy. Thus, the Byzantine-Arab Wars precipitated the final separation between the Eastern Christian Churches (led by the patriarch of Constantinople) and the Western Church (led by the Roman Pope).

Q: What was the official language of the Byzantine Empire during the Middle Ages?

A: The official language of the Byzantine Empire was Latin until the 7th century, when Emperor Heraclius replaced Latin for Greek. Still even before Heraclius’s reforms, the Byzantine Empire had been oriented towards Greek culture, and Greek cohabited with Latin for centuries. After Heraclius’s reforms, Latin fell quickly into disuse. Do not forget that in the Middle Ages, the Byzantine Empire was an important trading center in the Mediterranean, and subsequently many other languages, such as Chinese and Aramaic, were spoken in its commercial cities.

Day 165

Q: Why is the book The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire by Edward Gibbon so important?

A: It is so important, because in The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776-1788), Edward Gibbon anticipated the modern scholar’s methodology. He meticulously used primary sources, which gave a highly objective approach to his research and narrative. Subsequently, the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire is commonly regarded as the greatest historical achievement of Enlightenment historiography and the greatest work of history written in English. Modern scholarship often describes Edward Gibbon as the first modern historian of ancient Rome.

Day 167

Q: Why did Pope John Paul II refer to Charlemagne as the “Father of Europe?”
A: Because when Charlemagne became Emperor of the Romans in 801, he managed to unify the territory of the Roman Empire—at least the Western one. In the eyes of the Pope and his contemporaries, he was the successor to the Roman Emperors. Moreover, his reign witnessed the emergence of a distinct European society and culture emerged. In fact, modern scholars believe that the Carolingian renaissance was a formative period of creation of European identity.

Day 168

Q: For decades, the Middle Ages were described as a time of darkness, but were there any outstanding achievements?

A: Firstly, it is a mistake to describe the Middle Ages as a time of darkness. Remember that the concept of the “Dark Ages” was created by Italian scholar Petrarch in the 14th century to designate the Late Latin literature, not to describe the character of the Middle Ages. It was popular culture that expanded the concept to describe the Middle Ages as a time of backwardness. Since the 20th century, there has been increased recognition of the accomplishments of the Middle Ages as for example its art (i.e. painter Giotto di Bondone and sculptor Nicola Pisano); architecture (i.e. Chartres and Santiago de Compostela cathedrals); literature (i.e. Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Geoffrey Chaucer); mathematics (i.e. Leonardo Pisano and Nicole Oresme); philosophy (i.e. Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of Hippo); medicine (Roger Frugard and Theodoric Borgognoni); and education (i.e. the founding of the Universities of Paris, in 1150; Bologna, in 1158; Oxford, in 1167; Montpelier, in 1181; and Padua, in 1222).

Q: Is the term “feudalism” an anachronism?

A: Whether the term “feudalism” is an anachronism or not has been a subject of arduous debate among scholars for the last fifty years. This debate started in 1974, when American historian Elizabeth Brown described the term feudalism as anachronistic in her paper “The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe,” published by the American Historical Review. Brown challenged the value of using it, because the term not only gives a false sense of uniformity, but it is a modern invention by historians which does not reflect the reality of the concept. Brown’s proposition found numerous followers among the historical community, including British medievalist Susan Reynolds. Many of these supporters believe that feudalism is a term invented for the historian’s convenience. Today, historians tend to distinguish between feudalism, a political regime, and manorialism, the organizing principle of medieval economy.

Day 169

Q: In the Middle Ages, were all manors owned by the nobility?

A: No. A large number of manors in Medieval Europe were owned and run by bishoprics and monasteries.

Day 170

Q: In the Middle Ages, could any individual become a knight?
A: In the Early Middle Ages, in principle, any cavalry soldier or “horseman” with a horse and the right horse equipment was considered a knight. However, remember that horses were extremely valuable, so in reality, anybody who could afford such an expensive item tended to be a member of the nobility anyway. Then, by the High Middle Ages, knights became a social stratus or class within the nobility. Even militarily, cavalrymen became divided into “milites gregarii” (common knights) and “milites praecipui” (leading knights).

Day 172

Q: Is it true that the Black Death was carried from China into Europe by rats?

A: Yes, modern scholarship attributes the Black Death pandemic that devastated Europe during the Middle Ages to an outbreak of Yersinia pestis—a type of bacteria, commonly present in Asian rodents. According to archaeological research, the outbreak of the epidemic started in China in the first quarter of the 14th century, then spreading along the Silk Road through Asia, reaching Crimea in 1346. From there, black rats infested with the Yersinia pestis bacteria took the plague by ship, reaching virtually every seaport of Europe and spreading inland.

Day 173

Q: What are the main rules of monastic life?

A: Strictly speaking, in Christian monasticism there are three basic rules: chastity, poverty, and obedience. These rules of monastic life are also known as “the three evangelical counsels” or “counsels of perfection.” These three vows have their origin in Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount as codified in Matthew.

Day 174

Q: Were there any female crusaders during the High Middle Ages?

A: Yes. The role of women in the crusades is a rather controversial subject. It is universally accepted that most participants in the crusades were male and that women certainly took part in the crusades as pilgrims and supporters. However, historians have argued for a long time whether women took part in the war as fighters. In the 1970s, historian Maurice Purcell stated that there was no such thing as a woman crusader until the 13th century, because no women were granted legal status as crucesignati. Modern scholarship argues that no even all male crusaders before the 13th century had been granted legal status as crucesignati. The experiences of two prominent women—Margaret of Beverley and Eleanor of Aquitaine—point to the fact that some women stepped out of conventional female roles, becoming “female crusaders.” Contemporary accounts recount how Margaret of Beverley, who had travelled to the Holy Land as a pilgrim, was wounded while fighting Saladin’s army wearing makeshift armor during the capture of Jerusalem in 1187. Similarly, Eleanor of Aquitaine took part in the Second Crusade by dressing in armor and carrying lances when she entered Constantinople in 1147.

Day 175

Q: In the Middle Ages, were there any graver sanctions than excommunication for heretics?
A: Yes. In the Middle Ages, anathema was a graver sanction than excommunication. While an excommunication would basically ban an individual from the rite of Eucharist, the anathema entailed the forced expulsion of a person from the Christian community. This religious sanction has its roots in the New Testament, where St. Paul used it to refer to the complete separation of heretics from the Christian community.