

	EAST		WEST
THEN		<h1>The Flip Centuries</h1> <p>When and How the West surpassed the East</p>	 <small>No Contemporary Pictures Available</small>
NOW			

From Antiquity to the 14th Century

Sources - 1

- The main source for this presentation is *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon, first published in 1788. (I use the 1978 reprint of the 1910 Everyman's Library unabridged edition.)
- Gibbon uses the correct term, **Roman Empire**, for the state whose capital was Constantinople, and which lasted until 1453. Historians usually refer to that state as **Byzantine Empire**, but that was never its name.

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Sources - 2

- Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East, A brief History of the last 2000 years*, Touchtone, 1995. !!!
- Bernard Lewis *What Went Wrong?*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2002. ???
- Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules - For Now*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature*, Viking, 2011.
- Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest*, Penguin, 2011.

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The Good Old East: Alexandria (Egypt) at its Peak

- Home of many famous Mathematicians.
- **Euclid** (c. 350 – c. 250 BCE), the founder of Geometry.
- **Eratosthenes** (276 – 194 BCE). He estimated the circumference of the earth. (Born in what is now Libya.)
- **Pappus** (c. 290 – c. 350 CE). Numerous contributions in Mathematics that, more than 1000 years later, influenced Descartes, Fermat, Euler, et al.

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The Effect of Official Christianity

- All that intellectual flourish ended when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire (late 4th century CE).
- “You should not read any book other than the Bible. If the book agrees with the Bible, you are wasting your time. If it does not, then it has been inspired by the devil and you are a sinner.”
- The setback was more significant in the East than in the West where there was little intellectual activity to suppress.

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Revival in the East

- Less than 300 years later, **Islam** replaced **Christianity** as the dominant religion of what we call *Middle East*.
- The lands conquered by the Arabs experienced an intellectual (and economic) flourish, the Arab Golden Age.
- The “Arabs” collected any manuscript of Greek learning that they could find and translated it into Arabic. Eventually, these works were translated from Arabic into Latin.

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Scientific Advances

- There was significant progress in Mathematics. The English words **Algebra** and **Algorithm** bear witness to that progress since they are derived from Arabic.
- There were also advances in Astronomy and Medicine. A Latin translation of the Arabic work **The Canon of Medicine** was used as a standard medical textbook through the 18th century in Europe.

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Technological Advances

- In 799 the Arab caliph Harun al-Rashid received an embassy from Charlemagne. When the embassy went back it carried Harun's gifts that included a clock that was the source of amazement amongst the Europeans.
- *An aside:* The great progress made after Islam replaced Christianity as the religion of the Middle East undermines the argument that blames Islam for the current backwardness of the region.

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The Turks are Coming

- Turkish groups, newly converted to Islam, appear in the Middle East around the 10th century. The most notable amongst them was known as the Seljuk Turks. Very soon they established an empire that stretched from what is now Uzbekistan through Iran all the way to Armenia and Syria.
- In 1071 the Seljuk Turks defeated decisively the Romans (Byzantines) in the Battle of Manzikert and gained control of most of Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

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The Start of the Crusades

- The Romans asked the Pope of Rome for help against the Seljuks, but they got more than what they bargained for.
- In 1096 the disorganized masses of the "people's crusade" led by Peter the Hermit arrived in Constantinople. (The Romans gave them passage to Asia Minor where they were promptly massacred by the Turks.)
- The following year saw the arrival of the **knights** of the First Crusade.

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The Mechanics of War in Medieval Times



- Wars were fought by armored cavalry.
- Each cavalryman carried a lot of expensive equipment and needed several servants to help him in putting on his armor and to take care of his horse.
- Thus, the nobility (**knights**) did the actual fighting.

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The Economics of War in Medieval Times

- The fighters (knights) required a lot of support and had to be rich to be able to afford it.
- The source of their wealth was land ownership. (Feudal system: where a peasant or worker known as a vassal receives a piece of land in return for serving a lord or king.)
- In the case of the Crusades, the feudal lords had to do the fighting, so they themselves had to go to the Middle East.
- *Think of U.S. Senators going to Vietnam.*

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Notable Crusades

- **First (1097-1099) "Liberation" of Jerusalem.** Establishment of four crusader states around Jerusalem, Edessa, Antioch, and Tripoli.
- **Third (1191) Capture of Cyprus from the Byzantines.** Recapture of Acre and Jaffa from the Turks.
- **Fourth (1204) Capture of Constantinople.** Establishment of Crusader states in Roman Lands.
- **Seventh (1248-1254) Attacks at Egypt, but no gains.**
- **Ninth and Last (1272) Did not achieve anything.** Last crusader state in Acre fell in 1291.

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What did the Crusades Accomplish?

- They failed in their major objective to push away the Turks.
- Instead of helping, they damaged the Roman Empire.
- The Turks inflicted major defeats upon the Western European knights.

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Effect of the Crusades

- Gibbon has written that the major effect of the crusades was "not so much in producing a benefit as in removing an evil."
- The crusades weakened the oppressive European feudal structure. He goes on with a metaphor: "The conflagration which destroyed the tall and barren trees of the forest gave air and scope to the vegetation of the small and nutritive plants of the soil."

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The Renaissance

- The start of the **Renaissance** is usually placed around 1300, right after the crusades. (When painter Giotto broke away from the Byzantine style.)
- Is that a coincidence? If we accept Gibbon's argument, it is not.
- While there may have been other factors for the Western European Rebirth, the failure of the Crusades is certainly one.

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Other factors that may have helped Western Development

- The Black Death (bubonic plague of 1346-1353) caused the death of over 100 million people, creating a shortage of labor that forced the feudal lords to treat their subjects in a more humane way. *Likely*
- The fall of the Roman (Byzantine) Empire that led to the migration to the West of Greek speaking intellectuals who brought with them many of classical Greek works. *Unlikely*

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Western European Developments after the Crusades

- **1291: Founding of the Swiss Republic.**
- **1450 (appr): Invention of the printing press by Gutenberg.**
- **1492: First voyage of Christopher Columbus.**
- **1497: First voyage of Vasco da Gama who circumnavigated Africa.**
- **Religious Reform: Martin Luther (1483-1546).**
- **An Intellectual Giant: Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519).**

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Enlightenment

- **Even more important than the specific advances in Western Europe there was a change in attitude in the 17th century that is encapsulated by the word *Enlightenment*.**
- **Steven Pinker in his book *The Better Angels of our Nature* credits the Enlightenment with ushering a “Humanitarian Revolution.”**

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But What Kept the Middle East Back?

- While the rise of the West maybe explained by the weakening of the feudal structure, we are left with the question of what kept the East back.
- The short answer is that its feudal structure remained intact.
- We will look at the history of Middle East in the aftermath of the Crusades.

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To Be Continued

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