

# DID THE MIDDLE KINGDOM HAVE A MIDDLE PERIOD? THE PROBLEM OF “MEDIEVAL” IN CHINA’S HISTORY

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**D**ue largely to the contributions of postmodernism, scholars have become increasingly distrustful of the terms they use to describe historical phenomena. This has led them to avoid using general categories or labels. Yet, for instructors attempting to make the diverse panorama of world history intelligible, these are exactly the rough tools needed to demonstrate that different societies have resolved similar problems with similar methods and institutions. One such term is “medieval,” which literally means the “Middle Ages,” and designates the period between antiquity and modernity. Ironically, even European medievalists have come to question the validity of the term that defines the time period.<sup>1</sup>

China specialists have long debated the applicability of this patently Western concept to Chinese history. Some deny its utility outright.<sup>2</sup> Many other scholars, though, assume that China had a medieval period. Yet amongst them, no consensus exists over when it started, how long it lasted, or what were its characteristics. Since these issues have proved intractable, Sinologists nowadays largely ignore them, as if they were unimportant.

However, periodization cannot be overlooked because it helps us make sense of historical phenomena. If historical time is not divided into discrete periods, how can we discern change over time? Periodization is important because it forces us to place China into a larger world context. A few specialists have been bold enough to posit the existence of a universal middle period that was experienced throughout Eurasia. For example, one researcher thinks that many Eurasian societies of the tenth and eleventh centuries were united in experiencing feudalism, a process by which an aristocracy of mounted warriors, linked together through vows of protection and obedience, subjugates a peasantry and becomes more important than any central institution.<sup>3</sup>

another medieval civilization—the early Arab empires—those differences seem less distinctive, because those regimes exhibited many similarities with medieval China. In short, by comparing three civilizations that existed in Eurasia during the first millennium CE, we can delineate a common set of characteristics that can be called medieval.

## Features Common to both Medieval China and Early Medieval Europe

One of the most important similarities that medieval China shared with its European counterpart was a high level of political decentralization. Like its Roman counterpart, the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) was a universal empire that uniformly ruled over a vast expanse of Asia: its control extended from the Tarim Basin in the northwest, bordering on modern day Afghanistan, to present day North Korea in the northeast, and all the way south to the middle of modern Vietnam. With the collapse of the Han, China was not reunited until the emergence of the strong polities of the Sui (581–617) and Tang (618–906) dynasties. Nevertheless, even the mighty Tang’s power over all of China was not lengthy—the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) effectively created autonomous military regimes in northeastern China. Nor was Tang control of what remained all that formidable, which is why the regime was forced to look to commercial taxes and a monopoly over salt production as alternate sources of revenue.<sup>4</sup> In short, during this nine-hundred-year period, China was often fragmented into short-lived regimes that governed only sections of the old Han Empire. How much power these governments wielded locally was also limited. The Han rule of avoidance, i.e., the regulation that an official could not serve in his home district, went into abeyance until the Sui. Similarly, the Northern Wei (386–535) did not even provide local officials with a salary—it assumed that rich magnate families would staff those positions. In

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Although his model is not suitable for Song dynasty China (960–1279), the researcher is right in searching for common experiences and characteristics that connected Eurasian civilizations.

In this same spirit, I contend that China, from 200 to 1000 CE, did indeed experience a medieval period. This era possessed an astonishing number of characteristics normally associated with early medieval Europe (500 to 1000 CE). It shared many of these features not because of coincidence, but because both places had to cope with the migration of Inner Eurasian peoples (those of modern-day Afghanistan, Mongolia, Russia, the former Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union, and the areas of Manchuria, Tibet, and Xinjiang, now parts of China). Of course, that is not to say there were not many differences; the second part of this article will describe them in full. The third part will underscore how, when we compare China to yet

fact, many regimes could extract revenue only from areas near the capital, which might account for the low official population counts.<sup>5</sup>

Another similarity with early medieval Europe was that the ruling elites were usually hybrid products of different cultures. That is to say, no matter what the ethnicity of a dynasty’s ruling family, its institutions and values stemmed from both Chinese and Inner Eurasian traditions. During the Northern and Southern dynasties period (316–581), northern China was ruled nearly exclusively by regimes established by Inner-Eurasian peoples, many of whom had previously been allowed to settle within China’s borders. Like Rome, China did not suffer so much from barbarian invasions, but from rebellions by oppressed immigrants. Having established governments, these alien elites often intermarried with Chinese families and received Chinese education. Both the Sui and Tang dynasties that unified China were led by elites of

mixed heritage. The Yang and Li families, which respectively founded these dynasties, had a long record of intermarriage with powerful non-Chinese families. Tang Emperor Taizong (r. 627–650), perhaps the greatest ruler of Medieval China, claimed not only the Chinese title of the Son of Heaven, but also the Inner Eurasian title of Khan. Until Taizong protested, his designated heir dressed in steppe garb, preferred speaking Turkish to Chinese, and lived in a yurt.<sup>6</sup> In short, both the Sui and Tang were Sino-Central Asian regimes.

Due to weak central governments and persistent chaos, China experienced a militarization of its society. Some of the earliest manifestations of this can be found in the tombs of the Eastern Han (25–220 CE). There one finds architectural models of tall lookout towers manned by armed warriors. These models indicate that, by the first century CE, members of the elite thought it necessary to protect themselves with something that resembles a castle's keep. A text on managing an estate reminds its readers to practice archery and military exercises, shore up and thicken the walls of the compound, and make timely repair of the five types of weapons.<sup>7</sup> From the second to eighth centuries, it is well known that many powerful families kept "family soldiers" (*jiabing*) and "bound retainers" (*buqu*) who served as their men-at-arms.<sup>8</sup> As in Europe, the most important warriors were mounted and armored in iron.<sup>9</sup> Even though the educated elite never relinquished their political and social prestige to a class of landowning warriors, literati were by no means strangers to warfare. They often served as generals and sometimes even fought. The great alchemist Ge Hong (283–343) tells us that, in battle, he killed two men and a horse and was trained in the use of the bow, knives, shield, single dagger, double halberd, and the seven-foot pole.<sup>10</sup> The famous recluse and prolific author Huangfu Mi (215–282), a descendant of a long line of generals, did not begin to earnestly study the classics until he was seventeen; before that he spent most of his time playing war games with his buddies.<sup>11</sup> Much of this military expertise is probably related to the fact that the lowest level magnate families, who did not have enough influence to place members in the regional and central governments, often specialized in military service to garner influence.

Due to lingering Inner Eurasian influence in the north, military capability remained important in the Tang. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the person of Tang Emperor Taizong, mentioned earlier. Unlike most native Chinese rulers and more like his steppe counterparts, he was adept at warfare. He engaged in combat so often that six of his chargers died under him from arrow wounds. He was so moved by their sacrifice that he had a realistic bronze relief made of each horse, including all battle wounds—one mount had over forty. He even sometimes challenged the heads of opposing armies to personal combat.<sup>12</sup>

Not only did military expertise have a heightened prestige in this period, but members of the upper class were often connected through voluntary ties. These ties took three principal forms: current subordinates,



A Chinese pottery tower from the Han dynasty.  
Source: *Exhibition of Chinese Clay Figures Reflecting [the] Ancient Mode of Life in the Collection of Tenri University Museum (Tokyo: Tenri Gallery, 1967).*

"former subordinates" (*guli*), and "family disciples" (*mensheng*). Former subordinates were men who had either once served under or had been summoned to office by a senior official described as his "old lord" (*jiujun*). Family disciples were men who supposedly once studied the Confucian Classics with their master, but it may be that they merely attached themselves to their benefactor's household to gain bureaucratic advancement. So important were these relationships that men were expected to mourn their patrons for three years, just as they would their father and emperor.<sup>13</sup> They were, of course, obligated to help their master in many other ways.

*For example, [Zhang Qian] served Xie Pou of Qianwei as a student. When Xie died, Zhang carried dirt on his back to form his master's tumulus. Three years later, Xie's son was killed. Zhang took revenge on his master's behalf, and then bound and presented himself at the Wuyang jail. He was released due to an amnesty. His contemporaries viewed him as righteous.*<sup>14</sup>

Like a son, Zhang not only had to mourn his patron, but endangered his own life to avenge him. Using these types of relationships to ad-

vance became so commonplace that men who wanted to flaunt their virtue would stress how they never sought the friendship of the rich and powerful. In many ways, private relations were more important than public office. This is most vivid during the Southern dynasties (317–581), when the men who wielded real power within the government were low-ranking southern courtiers who had gained the emperor's confidence through their skills, rather than high-ranking northern émigrés who were simply from prestigious families.

While voluntary subordination was on the rise among the elite, involuntary subordination became widespread among commoners. During the medieval period, to protect themselves from armed men and onerous taxes, many commoners surrendered their status as free men and became permanent subordinates of powerful landowners. Hence, during this period, the law divided people into "good people" (*liangmin*) and "inferior people" (*jianmin*). The latter were usually known as *ke* ("clients," "guests," or "retainers"), *buqu* ("bound retainers"), and slaves (*nu*). In Tang law, inferior people generally received more severe punishments than good people, while good people who perpetuated crimes against inferior people received lighter sentences.<sup>15</sup> Clients and bound retainers could not be bought or sold, but their master could transfer them to someone else. Both these categories of people often worked as agricultural laborers.<sup>16</sup> Their uncanny resemblance to European serfs should be obvious.

This period was also marked by the appearance of manors—relatively large concentrations of land that provided most of the owner's needs. As noted by Yan Chih-t'ui (531–591), a literatus and government official famous for his work on household management, within the gates of one's estates one can obtain everything he or she needs, except for salt.<sup>17</sup> The lands of the estate were farmed by slaves, hired laborers, or servile tenant farmers.<sup>18</sup> Ge Hong's following statement, although exaggerated, gives us a vivid picture of the manors' wealth:

## Due to the persistence of the bureaucratic style of ruling, medieval Chinese regimes were relatively stronger than their European counterparts.

*Their slaves and servants could form an army; if the gate of their compound was closed, it could become a market. Their cows and sheep conceal the plains and marshes; their fields and ponds cover a thousand li (one li equaled about 400 meters).*<sup>19</sup>

Yan Zhitui tells us that even an elite family that lives modestly should have twenty slaves, one hundred acres of land, a horse and carriage, and several ten-thousand cash in reserve.<sup>20</sup> In other words, at the local level, the medieval period saw the rise of large landowners. It should be noted, though, that unlike early medieval Europe, commerce never disappeared; in fact, southern China was experiencing what some have described as a commercial revolution.<sup>21</sup>

Beginning in the second century, China witnessed for the first time the rise of organized religions in the form of Buddhism and Daoism. Both religions claimed autonomy from the government and its tax regime. Both had clerics ordained by their particular sect's governing hierarchy to administer to the laity's spiritual needs. Buddhists and Daoists established monasteries that, in their own right, became powerful landholding establishments and commercial centers. At the same time, though, Buddhist monks and Daoist priests vied for government patronage. Their prayers and blessings conferred legitimacy to rulers and protection to their regimes. Although never entirely free of state control, Buddhist and Daoist establishments had enough freedom, popular support, and material resources to worry the government. Consequently, throughout the medieval period, regimes sporadically persecuted the two religions by closing monasteries and forcing monks or adepts to return to the tax rolls.

### Dissimilar Features

Although there were many obvious similarities between early medieval China and Europe, important differences existed as well. The most important was that China never experienced the same level of decentralization. Bureaucratic governments that at least nominally controlled large territories continued to exist. For example, from 317 until 589, the Yangzi River valley and the territories south of it were continuously governed by five regimes all headquartered in present-day Nanjing. Hence, this large area continued to be perceived as an undivided whole. From 316 on, although northern China suffered considerably more fragmentation (so many small regimes existed in the north that the period from 304–439 is called the Era of the Sixteen Kingdoms), by the mid fifth century, northern China was once again united under the rule of one government, the Northern Wei (386–534). Even after the demise of that state, the north was merely divided between two large regimes (the Eastern and Western Wei, then the Northern Zhou and the Northern Qi dynasties) until the Northern Zhou (557–581) conquered its eastern counterpart in 577.

Related to this point, the idea of a united empire never died, and strident regionalism never emerged. No matter how small a regime might have been, its founder called himself an emperor (*huangdi*), not a lesser form of nobility. These sovereigns viewed themselves as the rulers of all of what once was Han China. Consequently, regimes in both south and north periodically sent military expeditions to recover "lost" territory. This dream of a united China even inspired Inner Eurasian rulers. For example, in 381, a proto-Tibetan ruler, Fu Jian (r.

357–384), unified all of northern China. Then, in 383, he unsuccessfully attempted to conquer southern China. Due to the persistence of this dream of unification, emperors of opposing states were regarded as rebels or imposters.

At the same time, even though the presence of the state was minimal at the local level, the upper classes continued to identify with the bureaucratic center rather than with their hometown. Although there was a consciousness of the existence of regions, made evident in this era's profusion of local and regional geography works, men of prominence continued to pledge their loyalty to national bureaucratic entities and expressed disinterest in local issues.<sup>22</sup> A work such as Galbert of Bruges' *The Murder of Charles the Good*, which emphasizes the importance of the Count of Flanders while marginalizing the King of France, has no equivalent in medieval China.<sup>23</sup>

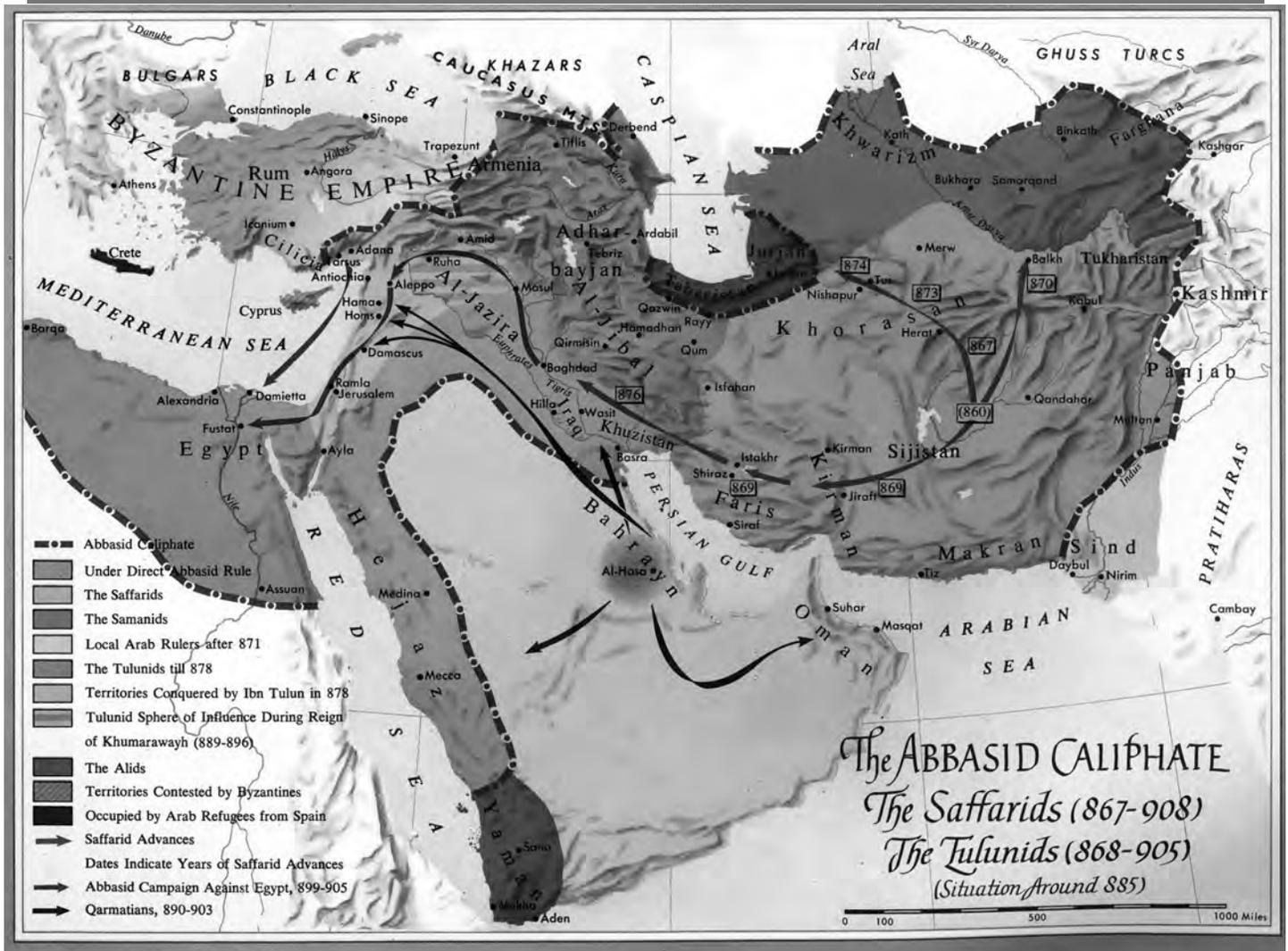
Another difference between the two early medieval civilizations is that, in China, learning and scholarship never lost prestige. While military men often founded dynasties, thereby obtaining important roles in politics and military affairs, they never commanded much prestige. Those who did were outstanding intellects, adept debaters, and paragons of exemplary behavior, or came from families known for producing such men. Moreover, candidates for office had to pass an examination. During the Northern Qi (551–577), this test was taken so seriously that men who made too many mistakes had to drink a pint of ink.<sup>24</sup> Even if the learned did not often wield real power, they still received the nominally highest positions in government—they were glistening ornaments that gave legitimacy to any regime they served. So great was their social cachet that imperial families, frequently military in origin, often attempted to establish marriage ties with these eminent clans—and were sometimes rebuffed. Since the Chinese states had working bureaucracies, even if one was not from the best, nationally recognized family, an education could still land a relatively cushy job. Given the unstable conditions of his time, Yan Chih-t'ui warned his descendents that,

*I have seen many captives who, though lowbred for a hundred generations, have become teachers through knowledge and study of the Analects and the Classic of Filial Piety. Others, though they had the heritage of nobility for a thousand years, were nothing but farmers or grooms, because they were unable to read or write.*<sup>25</sup>

Here, Yan is not even talking about a high level of literacy—the *Analects* and the *Classic of Filial Piety* were the first classics students learned. Hence, even an elementary classical education could pay dividends. In medieval China, the mastery of weapons never outshone the mastery of words, at least not in the minds of the literati.

Due to the persistence of the bureaucratic style of ruling, medieval Chinese regimes were relatively stronger than their European counterparts. Even though manors that harbored tax fugitives flourished, medieval governments often endeavored to register their populations, extract taxes from them, and limit their size.<sup>26</sup> This attempt to control people within the state had its greatest expression in the "Equal Fields" (*Juntian*) system of the Northern Wei, Sui, and Tang dynasties, in which the state claimed possession of all land and distributed it to people based on gender and age. To implement this system, every three

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The Abbasid Empire. Source: R. Roolvink, *Historical Atlas of the Muslim Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

years local officials had to verify the existence and age of each household member. Although scholars had long doubted that these regimes had the wherewithal to shoulder such an administrative burden, evidence from the northwest oasis city of Dunhuang seems to indicate that the system indeed functioned, even though not always in the ways intended.<sup>27</sup>

#### A Middle Eastern Alternative?

Even this brief survey indicates that medieval China differed substantially from early medieval Europe. However, maybe the differences between the two seem so great because they were on opposite poles of the spectrum. A way out of this trap is to find a society that shared characteristics with both medieval China and Europe. In reading accounts of the Crusades, it struck me as odd that European and Muslim land magnates could find common cause with each other and ally themselves against other Europeans and Muslims.<sup>28</sup> I then realized that, despite their cultural otherness, structurally the two societies were not

all that different: both were decentralized and both were dominated by a military elite composed of wealthy landowners. I also noticed that the world of the early Arab empires resembled medieval China in that bureaucratic governments were still functioning, the ruling class was culturally hybrid, voluntary private relations were of great importance, and learning was not only valued, but also celebrated. Here, I sketch briefly the similarities between medieval China and the Umayyad (661–750) and Abbasid (750–1250) dynasties.<sup>29</sup>

Under the banner of Islam in the 630s and 640s, Arab armies, composed of pastoral nomadic Bedouins, conquered most of North Africa, Palestine, and modern day Iraq and Iran. After a civil war in which the Umayyad clan of Mecca emerged victorious, Mu'awiyah (r. 661–680), the governor of Syria, founded the first Islamic empire and dynasty, the Umayyad, with its capital in Damascus. This was an Arab regime that discouraged non-Muslims from converting to Islam. With the support of an army from Eastern Iran and many non-Arab converts,

descendants of an uncle of the prophet established the Abbasid dynasty in 750. Reflecting the growing importance of the empire's eastern territories, the capital was moved to Baghdad. The Abbasid imperium briefly extended from Spain all the way to Central Asia. A cosmopolitan regime, it emphasized the equality of all Muslims no matter their ethnicity.<sup>30</sup>

Like their Chinese counterparts, these regimes were cultural hybrids. Similar to the Inner Eurasians who swept into northern China, Bedouins from the Arabian steppe allowed submissive localities to retain their original leadership and religions. Greek and Persian administrators retained their jobs and merely reported to Arab overlords. Urbanized Arabs soon assimilated into the culture of the city in which they lived; for example, those living in Persia soon spoke Persian and wore Persian clothes. Non-Arabs soon made their



Two Chinese scholars collating texts. Pottery figures from the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420). Source: Akiyama Terukazu, et al., *Arts of China: Neolithic Cultures to the T'ang Dynasty* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1968).

ruled as a large bureaucratic state that could collect taxes and replace its provincial appointees at will. Even though the Abbasid's centralized power was short-lived, its regional successor regimes were also run as bureaucracies. Although they resorted to feudalistic money-saving measures, these regimes still maintained an element of bureaucratic control. For example, although soldiers could collect taxes on their *iqta*, it was still public land supervised by government bureaucrats.<sup>31</sup>

Just as in China, in the Muslim Middle East, patron-client and person-to-person relationships were of overwhelming importance. Among both officials and soldiers, the custom of *istina* (sustained patronage) was of immense significance. In this system, a patron would take a client under his wing and do his utmost to advance his career. In return,

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way into the government and the military by becoming *mawali* “clients” who professed Islam. After their conversion to Islam in the tenth century, Turks began to take over large portions of southwest Asia. Indicative of the diversity of these regimes, it soon became proverbial to say that rulers were Turkish, bureaucrats Persian, and religious scholars Arab.

Despite the fact that these were unified empires, both dynasties experienced a marked degree of decentralization. Early on in the Umayyad, the caliph had no army of his own and had to rely on the military cooperation of autonomous Arab tribes that garrisoned cities. At the same time, most people, non-converts, were still largely ruled by their pre-conquest rulers according to previous customs. To maintain their privileged status in this new social world, the pre-conquest upper classes often converted to Islam. The succeeding Abbasid dynasty did not last long as a united empire. In 821, the government lost direct control of Eastern Iran; in 868, the mamluk (Turkish slave soldier) governor of Egypt rebelled and took over the province as his own kingdom; and by 935, the regime no longer governed any place except the areas around the capital. Ten years later, the Abbasids lost control of even the capital to the Buwayhids, a family from south of the Caspian Sea who reduced the caliphs to mere religious figureheads. Many of the regimes that set up new states in different parts of the Abbasid empire were headed by alien warlords supported by mamluk armies. Instead of receiving costly salaries, though, these soldiers often received *iqta*—“land concessions” or “military fiefs”—the right to collect taxes from a specific piece of land.

Nevertheless, like China, bureaucratic regimes never completely disappeared. In response to the armed threat posed by religious dissenters, the Caliph Abd al-Malik (685–705) and his successor, al Walid (r. 705–715), centralized state power by making Arabic the language of administration, handing bureaucratic positions to Muslims (rather than non-Muslim Greeks or Persians), minting their own coins, and creating a professional army. The Abbasid continued this trend and

the client owed permanent loyalty to his superior. In fact, the client treated his patron like his father and often stated that his patron had “raised” or “trained” him. Although *istina* could be used to cement ties between men who were near in age, usually the client was either a young mamluk or a clerk. These clients could be called upon to sacrifice themselves for their patron or save him from hardships.<sup>32</sup> The great Muslim historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) even claimed that the affection that clients and allies had for their patron could be stronger than blood relations. By living together, they shared the same hardships, goals, and could count on each other for help.<sup>33</sup> Hence, in many striking ways, relationships among Muslim soldiers and bureaucrats closely resembled medieval Chinese patron-client relationships. In both places, even in public settings such as the bureaucracy and the army, personal relations were often more important than formal status or office.

Like China, the Muslim world never faltered in putting a premium on the importance of education and culture. Undoubtedly, this is due to the central importance of the Quran in fashioning Muslim customs, mores, outlook, and law. To be a good Muslim, one had to know the Quran and the Hadith “Traditions of Mohammed’s words and actions.” What is more, since Islamic law, known as the *Sharia* “Way of Life,” is based on these texts, any person who wanted to rule had to either know them or surround himself with those who did. Thus, just as Confucian scholars who knew the classics, the font of most Chinese political and social wisdom, commanded overwhelming prestige in medieval China, so too did the *ulama* (religious scholars) of the Muslim world.<sup>34</sup>

Another impetus to learning was that the upper classes of China and the Muslim world were urbanized and often engaged in trade. Literacy was a necessary tool for engaging in business. The availability of paper-making in the ninth century made it much easier to generate books. As a result, all major cities had book markets, and well-to-do families had their own libraries. To be a gentleman, one had to have

a command of poetry and a good knowledge of many subjects such as science, history, religion, philosophy, and literature. Due to this veneration for learning, leaders endeavored to enhance their legitimacy by showing that they, too, put a premium on knowledge; hence, they lavishly supported poets, astronomers, philosophers, and doctors.<sup>35</sup>

One final similarity is the fact that Muslim religious scholars, like Christian clergy and Buddhist and Daoist monks, had similarly ambiguous positions vis-à-vis the government. On the one hand, the ulama viewed dynastic government with suspicion—they accused the caliphs of turning the government into a *mulk* (a kingship), which meant a government that existed only to benefit the ruler and not the community at large.<sup>36</sup> The ulama could afford to be standoffish because they were supported by the people rather than the crown. On the other hand, to gain legitimacy, rulers frequently tried to bring the clerics into government by hiring them as judges. Hence, like Christian clerics and Buddhist monks, Muslim religious scholars were autonomous, and the government tried to control them through patronage.

### Conclusion

Undoubtedly, if we took a closer look at the Arab dynasties and compared them to their Chinese counterparts, we would find substantial differences. The point is, though, that until now scholars have focused primarily on the dissimilarities between these civilizations. While those differences are great, they often mislead us into overemphasizing the uniqueness of each culture. From the second century to the eleventh, China, Europe, and Southwest Asia all faced the common threat of the migration of steppe peoples into their empires and kingdoms. Thus, it should not surprise us that they would develop similar institutions and measures to deal with this shared problem. The common features are culturally mixed ruling elites, political decentralization, an emphasis on private relationships, the growth of a powerful group of landholders, and the appearance of an autonomous organized religion. By comparing three civilizations rather than two, their commonalities emerge into sharper focus. These same commonalities made it so that someone from China could have traveled to the Muslim and Christian civilizations and found themselves, if not at home, at least not totally in an alien world. It is my hope that this article sheds light on the common traits of these medieval civilizations. ■

### NOTES

1. Timothy Reuter, "Medieval: Another Tyrannous Construct?" *The Medieval History Journal* 1.1 (1998), 3–25.
2. See T. H. Barrett, "China and the Redundancy of the Medieval," *The Medieval History Journal* 1.1 (1998), 73–89, and Timothy Brook, "Medievality and the Chinese Sense of History," *The Medieval History Journal* 1.1 (1998), 145–164.
3. R. J. Barendse, "The Feudal Mutation: Military and Economic Transformations of the Ethnosphere in the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries," *Journal of World History* 14.4 (2003), 503–529.
4. D. C. Twitchett, *Financial Administration and the T'ang Dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 49–65.
5. Hans Bielenstein, "The Census of China during the Period 2–742 A.D.," *The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 19 (1947), 145–148.
6. Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 139–145.
7. Hsu Cho-yun, *Han Agriculture*, ed. Jack L. Dull (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980), 218, 225.
8. Tang Changru, "Clients and Bound Retainers in the Six Dynasties Period," in *State and Society in Early Medieval China*, ed. Albert E. Dien (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 127–134.
9. Albert E. Dien, "A Study of Early Chinese Armor," *Artibus Asiae* 43 (1981–82), 5–66.
10. Jay Sailey, *The Master who Embraces Simplicity: A Study of the Philosopher Ko*

- Hung*, A.D. 283–343 (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, Inc. 1978), 267.
11. Dominik Declercq, *Writings Against the State: Political Rhetorics in Third and Fourth Century China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 164–165.
  12. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 144.
  13. Patricia Ebrey, "Patron-Client Relations in the Later Han," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103.3 (1983), 533–542.
  14. This quotation comes from a fourth-century regional history of southwest China. Its title is *Records of the Countries South of Mount Hua (Huayang guozhi)*.
  15. Wallace Johnson, tr. *The T'ang Code, Volume I: General Principles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 28–29.
  16. E. G. Pulleyblank, "The Origins and Nature of Chattel Slavery in China," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1.2 (1958), 212.
  17. Yen Chih-t'ui, *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan: Yen-shih chia-hsiin*, tr. Teng Ssu-yü (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 16.
  18. Francesca Bray, "Agricultural Technology and Agrarian Change in Han China," *Early China* 5 (1979–80), 8–9, and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "Estate and Family Management in the Later Han as seen in the *Monthly Instructions of the Four Classes of People*," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17 (1974), 200–201.
  19. Sailey, *The Master who Embraces Simplicity*, 193.
  20. Yen, *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan*, 127.
  21. Liu Shufen, "Jiankang and the Commercial Empire of the Southern Dynasties: Change and Continuity in Medieval Chinese Economic History," in *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200–600*, eds. Scott Pearce, Audrey Spiro, and Patricia Ebrey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 36–52.
  22. Andrew Chittick, "The Development of Local Writing in Early Medieval China," *Early Medieval China* 9 (2003), 44–45.
  23. Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good*, ed. and tr. James Bruce Ross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).
  24. Albert Dien, "Civil Service Examinations: Evidence from the Northwest," in *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm*, 104.
  25. Yen, *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan*, 54.
  26. William G. Crowell, "Northern Émigrés and the Problems of Census Registration under the Eastern Jin and Southern Dynasties," in *State and Society in Early Medieval China* (Stanford University Press, 1991), 171–210.
  27. Victor Cunrui Xiong, "The Land-tenure System of Tang China: A Study of the Equal-field System and the Turfan Documents," *T'oung Pao* 85 (1999), 328–390.
  28. Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, tr. E. J. Costello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
  29. I realize that, since Islamic civilization had its beginnings only in the early seventh century, it is odd to speak of the early Muslim empires as a "medieval" civilization. However, I do so because I view them as succeeding the ancient bureaucratic civilizations of the Middle East.
  30. An insightful and brief account of the Arab conquests and their social ramifications can be found in Patricia Crone, "The Early Islamic World," in *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, eds. Kurt Raaflaub and Nathan Rosenstein (Cambridge, MA: Center for Hellenic Studies, 1999), 309–332.
  31. Much of the information in this and the preceding paragraph comes from Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 126–152.
  32. For a discussion of *istina*, see Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 82–93.
  33. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, tr. Franz Rosenthal, ed. N. J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 148.
  34. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab People* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 158–166.
  35. Hourani, *A History of the Arab People*, 189–208, and Richard N. Frye, *Bukhara: The Medieval Achievement* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1996).
  36. Crone, "The Early Islamic World," 318.

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