CHAPTER 26

*Civilizations in Crisis: The Ottoman Empire, the Islamic Heartland, and Qing China*

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The parts of Asia still independent from European dominance after 1750 suffered from political decline and from the reactions to new challenges. They also faced the threat of Western imperialism and the West’s industrial lead. China, under the Qing dynasty in the 17th century, enjoyed growth and prosperity and had the power to limit European intervention. The Ottomans, on the contrary, were in full retreat. Russia and Austria seized territories, north African provinces broke away, and local leaders throughout the empire became more independent. Economic and social disruption accompanied the political malaise. Although the Ottoman rulers did not have a solution to their problems, they regained some strength during the 19th century by following Western-style reforms. At the end of the century, the foundations of Chinese civilization had been demolished by internal and external pressures.

From Empire to Nation: Ottoman Retreat and the Birth of Turkey. By the early 18th century, the Ottoman Empire was in decline. The weak rulers of the empire left the way open for power struggles among officials, religious experts, and Janissary commanders. Provincial administrators and landholders colluded to drain revenue from the central treasury. The general economy suffered from competition with the West as imported goods ruined local industry. European rivals took advantage of Ottoman weakness. The Austrians pushed the Ottomans from Hungary and the northern Balkans. The strengthened Russian state expanded into the Caucasus and Crimea. The subject Christian peoples of the Balkans challenged their rulers: The Greeks won independence 1830, and Serbia won independence in 1867.

Reform and Survival. The Ottomans survived the continuing defeats partly because the European powers feared the consequences of territorial division among the victors. The British propped up the Ottomans during the latter 19th century to prevent the Russians from reaching the Mediterranean. The weakened empire was preserved by internal reform. Selim III’s modest military and administrative reform attempts angered officials and the Janissaries; he was deposed and killed in 1807. Mahmud II was more successful. With the help of European advisors, he built a professional army that destroyed the Janissaries in 1826. Mahmud II then launched far-reaching reforms patterned on Western models. Between 1839 and 1876, the period of the Tanzimat reforms, university education was reorganized on Western lines, postal and telegraph systems were introduced, and railways were constructed. Newspapers were established, and in 1876 a European-type constitution was promulgated. The many changes opened the empire to Europeans and threatened some groups. Artisans lost out to the foreign competition. Women gained little from the reforms as Islamic patterns continued.

Repression and Revolt. The reforms strengthened the state, but they threatened the dynasty. Western-oriented officials, military officers, and professionals viewed the sultanate as a barrier to more reform. They also clashed with the conservative ulama and ayan. Sultan Abdul Hamid (1878-1908) responded by trying to return to despotic absolutism. He nullified the constitution and restricted civil liberties, but he continued military and educational reform and railway and telegraph construction. Abdul Hamid’s harsh rule ended in 1908 when he was removed by the
Young Turks, reformers, including military officers, who wanted to continue Western-style reforms. The constitution and civil liberties were restored in a regime directed by a figurehead sultan. Factional fights among the reformers hampered their efforts, while wars in the Balkans and north Africa lost territory. The Arabs under Ottoman rule began to seek their independence. The empire survived, but in a very weakened condition, until Turkish entry into World War I resulted in its dissolution.

**In Depth: Western Dominance and the Decline of Civilization.** Some general patterns have been associated with the decline of civilizations: internal weakness and external pressures; slow and vulnerable communications systems; ethnic, religious, and regional differences; corruption and the pursuit of pleasure. Nomads took advantage of such weaknesses, but rarely did a neighboring civilization play a major role in the demise of another. The European rise to world dominance from the 18th century fundamentally changed the patterns of the rise and fall of civilizations. In the Americas, European military assaults and diseases destroyed existing civilizations. African and Asian civilizations were able to withstand the early European arrival, but the latter’s continuing development by the end of the 18th century made them dominant. The subordinate civilizations reacted differently. Some retreated into an idealized past; others absorbed ideas from their rulers. The various efforts at resistance did not all succeed. Some civilizations survived; others collapsed.

**Western Intrusions and the Crisis in the Arab Islamic Heartlands.** The leaders and thinkers of the Islamic world were divided about how to reverse decline and drive back Europeans. They argued over a spectrum ranging from a return to the past to the adoption of Western ways. By the 19th century, the Arabs under the weakened Ottoman Empire were exposed to the danger of European conquest. The loss of Islamic territory to the Europeans engendered a sense of crisis in the Middle East.

**Muhammad Ali and the Failure of Westernization in Egypt.** Napoleon’s victory over the Ottoman Mamluk vassals in Egypt destroyed the existing local power balance. The easy victory of the French demonstrated the vulnerability of Muslim regions before European power. When the British forced French withdrawal, an Albanian Ottoman officer, Muhammad Ali, emerged as Egypt’s ruler by 1811. He introduced European military reforms and created a powerful army and navy that freed him from dependence on his nominal Ottoman overlord. Muhammad Ali also attempted, with limited success, to modernize Egypt’s economy through reforms in agriculture, infrastructure, education, and industry. To keep Egypt secure, Muhammad Ali allied with the powerful rural landlords to control the peasantry. The landlords resisted his reform efforts and remained a hereditary, entrenched class. The peasants were impoverished by the state’s continuing demands. The limited scope of Muhammad Ali’s reforms checked his plans for territorial expansion and left Egypt exposed to European threats. His successors confined their energies to Egypt and the Sudan.

**Bankruptcy, European Intervention, and Strategies of Resistance.** Muhammad Ali’s less talented successors abandoned reform and allowed the ayan to profit at the expense of the peasantry. Egypt became dependent on the export of a single crop, cotton. State revenues were spent on extravagant pastimes and military campaigns in the Sudan. The regime and the elite became indebted to European creditors. The Europeans invested in the building of the Suez Canal, which opened in 1869. Muslim intellectuals and political activists looked for ways to protect Egypt from its inept rulers. The ancient University of al-Azhar became a focal center for Muslims from many lands. Some of the thinkers looked to the past, but others, such as al-
Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, stressed the need for Muslims to adopt Western science and technology. They emphasized the importance of the tradition of rational inquiry in Islamic history and contested conservative views that the single source of truth was found in a literally interpreted Qur'an. The persisting difference between the rival interpretations damaged Muslim ability to meet the European threat. The growing Egyptian foreign debt and the strategic importance of the Suez Canal stimulated British and French thoughts of intervention. When army officer Ahmad Orabi led a revolt against the khedive in 1882, the British intervened to save the ruler. British consuls thereafter directed the Egyptian government through puppet khedives.

Jihad: The Mahdist Revolt in the Sudan. The British were drawn into the disorder in the Sudan. Egyptian efforts at conquests from the 1820s had won only an insecure hold over fertile lands along the Nile and towns such as Khartoum. Camel nomads resisted their authority. The corrupt Egyptian regime oppressed sedentary farmers and alienated all classes by trying in the 1870s under British influence to end the slave trade. The Muslims of the northern Sudan found a leader in Muhammad Achehmad, a religious figure known as the Mahdi. He proclaimed a jihad against the Egyptians and British that would return Islam to its original purity. The Mahdi won control of the Sudan. After his death, the movement continued under the capable Khalifa Abdallah. The Mahdists built a strong state with a society closely regulated by strict Islamic norms. The British ended this threat to European domination when General Kitchener crushed the Mahdist forces at Omdurman in 1896. Abdallah was killed and the state disintegrated. The world of Islam suffered serious reverses during the 19th century. All efforts, from reform to resistance, did not halt the European advance. Local economies became dependent on European products and demands. As the century closed, Islam, still divided over the explanation for its decline, was seriously threatened by the European rulers of most of the world.

The Last Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the Qing Empire in China. The Manchu leader Nurhachi (1559-1626) united the tribes of his region into a formidable fighting force that conquered much of Manchuria and drove back the Chinese living to the north of the Great Wall. The Manchu elite increasingly adopted Chinese ways in bureaucracy and court ceremonies. Many of the Chinese scholar-gentleman entered Manchu service. The Manchu seized advantage of the weakness of the Ming dynasty to enter China and seize control of Beijing in 1644. Within two decades, the Manchu were masters of China. As the Qing dynasty, they ruled an area larger than any previous dynasty had, except the Tang. The Manchu retained much of the political system of the Ming, although they assumed a more direct role in appointing local officials and reduced their tax exemptions. Chinese and Manchu officials were paired at the highest posts. The examination system continued. The rulers were generous patrons of the arts and employed scholars to compile great encyclopedias of Chinese learning.

Economy and Society in the Early Centuries of Qing Rule. The Manchu also maintained the social system of the Ming. The values of respect for rank and acceptance of hierarchy were emphasized. The extended family remained the core unit among the elite. Women continued under the dominance of elder men. Their lives centered on the household. Daughters were less wanted than sons, and female infanticide probably rose during this period. Lower-class women continued to work in fields and markets. The Manchu attempted to alleviate rural distress and unrest through decreasing tax and labor burdens; repairing roads, dikes, and irrigation systems; and limiting land accumulation by the elite. Population growth and the lack of available land checked the success of the reform efforts. Landlords increased their holdings and widened the gap between rural classes. Commercial and urban expansion increased under the peaceful conditions of the first century and during half of Manchu rule. Until the end of the 18th century,
the influx of silver in payment for exports created a favorable balance of payments. European traders came to Canton, and Chinese merchants traveled overseas. A new group of merchants, the compradors, who specialized in the import-export trade along the southern coast, were a major link between China and the outside world.

**Rot from Within: Bureaucratic Breakdown and Social Disintegration.** By the late 18th century, the Qing were in decline. The exam system, which provided able bureaucrats, was riddled by cheating and favoritism. Positions in government service were seen as a method of gaining influence and building family fortunes. The resulting revenue loss caused a weakening of the military and deterioration of the dikes confining the Yellow River. By the middle of the 19th century, flooding left millions of peasants without resources. Throughout the empire, mass migrations and banditry increased social unrest. The existing Chinese social and economic systems could not cope with the changes stemming from the greatly increased population resulting from the introduction of American crops.

**Barbarians at the Southern Gates: The Opium War and After.** The Manchus continued to treat Europeans as just another type of barbarian, although the advances by Europeans in science and industry made them dangerous rivals to the empire. Confrontation occurred over the importation of opium from India into China. The British had lacked commodities, apart from silver, to exchange for Chinese goods. Opium reversed the trade balance in their favor, but the Chinese saw the trade as a threat to their economy and social order. Silver left the country and opium addiction became rampant. Government efforts to check the problem failed until the 1830s, when an important official, Lin Zexu, came to end the trade at Canton and nearby. He blockaded European trading areas and destroyed opium. The British merchants demanded and received military intervention. War began in 1839; the Chinese were defeated on sea and land and sued for peace. Another conflict ended similarly in the 1850s. The settlement after the first war awarded Hong Kong to the British and opened other ports to European trade and residence. By the 1890s, 90 ports were open and foreigners had gained long-term leases over ports and surrounding territory. Opium continued to pour into China. By the middle of the century, British officials managed China’s foreign trade and customs, and the court had to accept European ambassadors.

**A Civilization at Risk: Rebellion and Failed Reforms.** The dislocations caused by the European incursions spawned a massive rebellion in southern China during the 1850s and 1860s. A semi-Christian prophet, Hong Xiuquan, began the Taiping Rebellion. The dissidents offered programs of social reform, land redistribution, and liberation of women. They attacked the traditional Chinese elite. The provincial gentry rallied to the Qing and assisted in the defeat of the rebellion. In the last decades of the century, dynamic provincial leaders led a “self-strengthening” movement aimed at countering the challenge of the West. They encouraged foreign investment in railways and factories and military modernization. They wanted only to preserve the existing order, not to transform it. Although they professed loyalty to the dynasty, the Manchu increasingly were unable to control the provinces. Despite a defeat by Japan in 1894-1895, the Manchu and their allies among the scholar-gentry resisted reform. The last decades of the dynasty were dominated by the dowager empress, Cixi; in 1898 she crushed a serious reform effort. The involvement of members of the royal household in the Boxer Rebellion further weakened China.

**The Fall of the Qing: The End of a Civilization?** After the defeat of the Taipings, resistance to the dynasty centered in secret societies. The revolts they inspired failed, but they were a training
MULTIPLE CHOICE. Choose the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. Which of the following European powers seized territories of the Ottoman Empire in the early decades of the 18th century?

   A) Austria-Hungary
   B) Britain
   C) France
   D) Italy
   E) Russia

2. In the later 1700s, Russia

   A) became the primary ally of the Ottoman Empire among the European powers.
   B) withdrew from the territories they had seized along the Crimea.
   C) conquered Constantinople and established a port on the Mediterranean.
   D) became the main threat to the Ottoman Empire’s survival.
   E) partitioned the Ottoman Empire much as Poland had been divided.

3. Which of the following states first achieved independence from the Ottoman Empire?

   A) Syria
   B) Serbia
   C) Palestine
   D) Austria-Hungary
   E) Greece

4. The Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II

   A) attempted to rid the Ottoman Empire of Western influences.
   B) successfully eliminated the Janissary corps as a military and political influence.
   C) attempted to restore absolutism and destroy the Western-style constitution of his predecessor.
   D) was toppled from the throne by a Janissary revolt.
   E) was known for his support of traditional Ottoman practices.

5. In what year was the revised constitution introduced as part of the Tanzimat reforms?

   A) 1800
   B) 1839
   C) 1848
   D) 1876
   E) 1898
6. The Ottoman Society for Union and Progress
   A) supported the reform efforts of Sultan Abdul Hamid.
   B) led the rebellion that overthrew Sultan Abdul Hamid.
   C) represented the older members of the ayan.
   D) was also known as the Arab League.
   E) wanted a return to traditional Muslim leadership.

7. The Napoleonic invasion of 1798 signaled the demise of what group’s rule in Egypt?
   A) The Fatimids
   B) The Umayyads
   C) The Mamluks
   D) The Almoravids
   E) The Mughals

8. By 1811, what ruler had established his dominance over Egypt?
   A) Murad, commander of the Mamluks
   B) Napoleon, French emperor
   C) Muhammad Ali, an officer in the Ottoman army
   D) Nurhaci, Almoravid military commander
   E) Robert Clive, British governor

9. What nation intervened militarily in Egyptian affairs in 1882?
   A) The Ottoman Empire
   B) France
   C) Italy
   D) Russia
   E) Britain

10. Which of the following rebellions was clandestinely supported by the Qing imperial court under Cixi?
    A) The Sepoy Rebellion
    B) The Taiping Rebellion
    C) The Shandong Rebellion
    D) The Kangxi Rebellion
    E) The Boxer Rebellion
SHORT ANSWER. Write the word or phrase that best completes each statement or answers the question.

1. The ________ reforms in the Ottoman Empire, between 1839 and 1876 reorganized education, established railways and telegraph systems, and resulted in a constitution based on European prototypes.

2. ________, the head of the coalition of Mamluk households that shared power in Egypt at the time of Napoleon’s arrival, dismissed the invader as insignificant.

3. Intermarrying with Turkish families, Muhammad Ali’s descendants provided a succession of rulers in Egypt known as ________.

4. The completion of the ________ Canal in 1869 shortened the distance by sea between Europe and Asia and allowed steamboats to replace sailing vessels.

5. At the battle of ________ in 1898, the bulk of the Mahdist cavalry and its commander were slaughtered.

6. Overseas trading links gave rise to a wealthy new group of merchants, the ________, who specialized in the import-export trade on China’s southern coast.

7. In the late 1830s, the Chinese emperor sent one of his most distinguished officials, ________, to stamp out the opium trade.

8. Led by a mentally unstable, semi-Christian prophet named Hong Xiuquan, the ________ Rebellion exacerbated stresses within Chinese society.

9. The last decades of the Manchu dynasty were dominated by the ultraconservative dowager empress ________.

10. In 1912, the last of emperor of China, a small boy named ________, was deposed.
TRUE/FALSE. Write ‘T’ if the statement is true and ‘F’ if the statement is false.

1. In the early years of the 18th century, the days of the Ottoman Empire appeared numbered.

2. Arab leaders in Beirut and Damascus, who originally favored the 1908 coup within the Ottoman Empire because they believed it would lead to independence, were soon disappointed by the new regime.

3. An attempt by the khedive to save money by disbanding Egyptian regiments and dismissing Egyptian officers led to a revolt led by Ahmad Orabi in the summer of 1882.

4. Overseas trading links gave rise to a wealthy new group of merchants, the compradors, who specialized in the import-export trade on China’s south coast.

5. Led by a mentally unstable, semi-Christianized prophet named Hong Xituquan, the Boxer Rebellion exacerbated the already considerable stresses within Chinese society.

6. Members of the Ottoman Society for Union and Progress were also known as the Progressive Ottomans.

7. Egyptian authority in the Sudan was concentrated in the administrative center of Khartoum.

8. Muhammad Achmad, known to his followers as the Mahdi, proclaimed a revolt in the Sudan against both Egyptian heretics and the British.

9. The Boxer Rebellion broke out between Britain and China in late 1839, resulting in a resounding defeat of the Chinese fleet.

10. The Taiping Rebellion broke out in 1898 and was put down only through the intervention of imperialist powers in 1901.
CHAPTER 26

TIMELINE

*Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.*

Boxer Rebellion begins in China
Ottoman Janissary corps destroyed
British occupation of Egypt
Tanzimat reforms in Ottoman Empire
Opium War begins in China
Taiping Rebellion begins in China

___ 1826
___ 1839
___ 1839
___ 1850
___ 1882
___ 1898

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

*The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one on a separate sheet of paper.*

al-Afghani  Muhammad Abduh  Ahmad Orabi
banner armies  Qing dynasty  Zhu Xi
Boxer Rebellion  Puyi  Murad
compradors  Lin Zexu  Opium War
jihad  General Kitchener  Battle of Omdurman
Khalifa Abdallah  banner armies  Kangxi
khartoum  Mahdi  Suez Canal
Muhammad Ali  khedives  Sultan Abdul Hamid
Sultan Selim III  Sultan Mahmud II  Tanzimat reforms
Taiping Rebellion  Hong Xiuquan  Cixi
Treaty of Nanjing  Young Turk Revolution  Battle of Aboukir
University of al-Azhar  Muhammad Achmad  ulama

Society for Union and Progress

410
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Boundaries of the Ottoman Empire
Boundaries of the Qing Empire

Look at the map from Chapter 22. Which of the two declining empires was closest to the European imperial interests in the Asian trade network? Does this help explain the more direct incursion of Europeans in one civilization than in the other?