The Story of the World

HISTORY FOR THE CLASSICAL CHILD

Volume 2: The Middle Ages

From the Fall of Rome to the Rise of the Renaissance

REVISED EDITION

with new maps, illustrations, and timelines

by Susan Wise Bauer

illustrated by Jeff West

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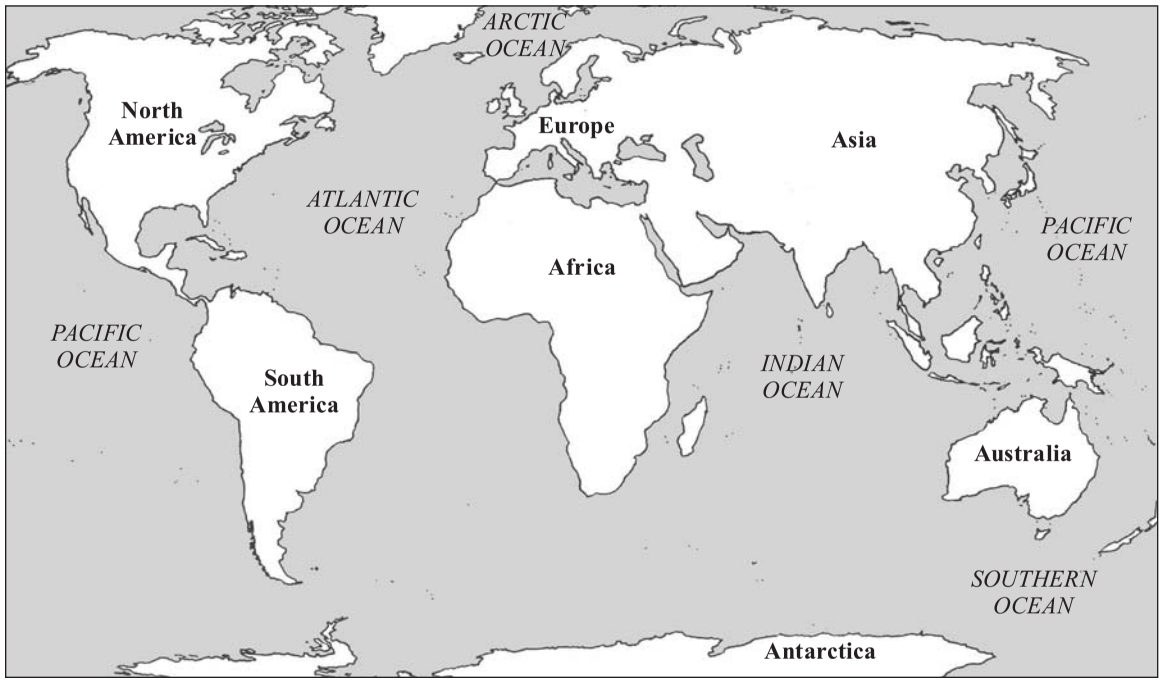
The World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Antarctica

Foreword

The hardest part of writing a world history is deciding what to leave out. In *The Story of the World,* I have tried to keep history simple and straightforward by highlighting the major events, personalities, and national stories of the world's cultures, in (more or less) chronological order. There's no way to simplify history without leaving out *something* important, so I encourage readers to use *The Story of the World* as a jumping-off point—a place of departure which can lead to further investigation of Mayan art, the French monarchy, English wars, or Native American cultures.

In writing this history, I have tried to keep my primary audience—young children—in mind. So although I describe major religious movements (the Reformation, the Counter Reformation, etc.) because of their historical importance, I have tried to tell these stories in a way that will allow parents and teachers to explain their religious significance. I know, for example, that Catholics and Protestants will very likely choose to highlight different aspects of the Reformation and Counter Reformation, which are complex events in which both Catholics and Protestants behaved with courage and with cruelty.

I have also chosen to ignore some events entirely. The Inquisition, for example, has historical importance. But its

violence is impossible to treat in a way that would make sense to an eight-year-old, and its effects on Western history are not as pervasive as those of the Reformation.

I have made an effort here not to treat the West as an island; the stories of Japan, China, Korea, Africa, India and Arabia are told, along with the stories of native peoples who lived in the Americas, in Australia, and in New Zealand. In selecting what episodes to include, I have tried to focus on what would prepare a child to understand today's world, rather than on the intricacies of past history. So I have given priority to those events and names which a child should know to be culturally literate, and also to those events which laid the foundation for the present day. For this reason, I spend a fair amount of time on the Emperor Justinian and his establishment of laws which are still foundational today, but I have given very little space to the later Byzantine emperors.

Although maps are included, the Renaissance was a time of exploration, and the reader will need a globe to trace the paths of the adventurers who went all around the world.

The chapters of the *Story of the World* follow a chronological pattern. However, I've tried to avoid confusing young readers by skipping from country to country too quickly. For example, Chapter Two tells about the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain in 449. I then continue on to tell (in Chapter Three) the story of Augustine's mission in England in 597, before moving to the east for Chapter Four and going back a few years to describe Justinian's rule of the Byzantine Empire (527–565) and the events that followed his reign. Important dates are given in the text; more dates are included in an appendix, so that parents, teachers, and older readers can locate events on a timeline.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Exploring the Mysterious East

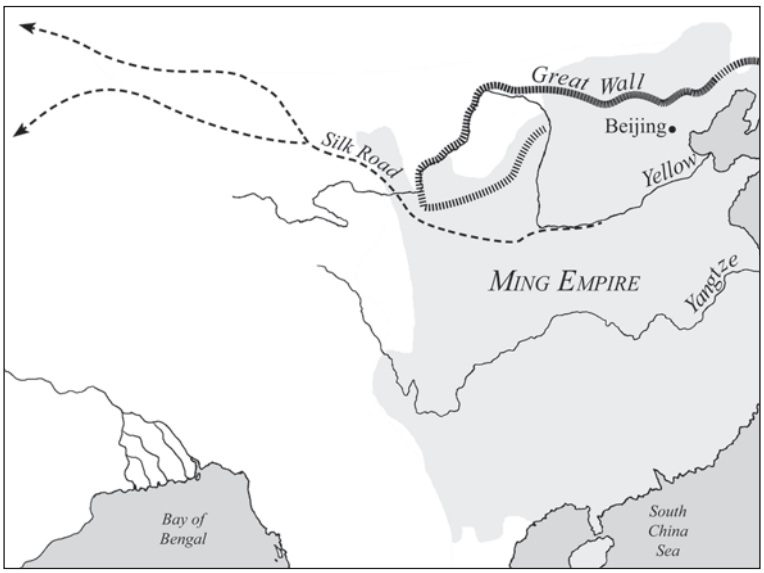
Marco Polo Goes to China

For people who lived in Europe, China was on the other side of the world. The long road that led to China, the Silk Road, led through mountains and along the edges of steep rocky cliffs. It wound through dry deserts where the only water was found in small pools under the scattered oases. Merchants who set off down the Silk Road to buy spices and jewels in China might be lost in a sandstorm in summer, or a snowstorm in winter. And China was so far away that it could take five years to travel down the Silk Road and return.

But the merchants who *did* manage to travel the Silk Road found wonderful things at its end: gold, cloves and ginger, jade and lacquer, rare and beautiful flowers, wine, sweet-smelling wood, rugs with rich complicated patterns, and the mysterious shining silk cloth that only the Chinese knew how to make. Europeans marveled over these treasures and hurried to buy them as soon as the caravans from China arrived.

Kublai Khan knew that trade with Europe would make China even more prosperous. So he did his best to encourage traders and merchants to come to his cities. He turned his

The Ming Dynasty and the Silk Road



Mongol soldiers into road-keepers and policemen and sent them out to guard the roads and protect travelers against bandits. As the journey grew safer, more and more merchants and adventurers traveled along the Silk Road to see the marvels of China's cities.

One of these adventurers was named Marco Polo. Marco Polo was the son of an Italian merchant named Niccolo. Before Marco was born, Niccolo left on a journey to China. He didn't come back until Marco was fifteen years old. When he did return, he told his son, "It took me three years to travel to the palace of the Great Khan. When I arrived, the Khan made me welcome and gave me a position as his messenger. All this time, I have been working for the emperor of China! He sent me back home to ask the pope for a hundred wise men who could explain Christianity. And he wants me to bring

him back some holy oil from Rome. You're a strong boy, and growing to be a man. You can travel with me to China."

So Marco and his father started back down the Silk Road, carrying holy oil for the emperor of China. The journey took four years! Marco and his father were attacked by bandits. They had to take a detour to avoid a war in one of the countries they passed through. Marco became ill and had to rest for a whole year.

But finally Marco and his father arrived in the city of Beijing. There they met the emperor, Kublai Khan. We know what Marco Polo thought about this meeting, because he wrote a book about his journey to China. This book, which he named *The Travels of Marco Polo,* was read all over the world. For many years, Marco Polo's book was the only way for people in the west to find out what China was like.

In his book, Marco Polo described the marble palace of the Khan. The palace stood in a huge walled garden where wild animals roamed the grounds. A man-made mountain rose up in the garden's center, with beautiful trees from every part of the world planted all over it. A lake filled with fish lay at the foot of the mountain, and a small palace for the Khan to relax in was built at its top.

Inside the palace, carvings of dragons and colorful paintings of battle scenes covered the walls. Marco Polo was led to a dining hall where six thousand people could eat at once. In his book, he wrote, "It is all painted in gold, with many histories and representations of beasts and birds, of knights and dames, and many marvelous things. Over all the walls and all the ceiling you see nothing but paintings in gold." Here the great feasts of the Khan were held—and Marco Polo tasted his first ice cream.

Merchant and explorer, Marco Polo

Marco Polo was amazed by the beautiful clothes that the Chinese people wore, by the abundance of fresh meat and vegetables in the Chinese markets, and by the size of the fruit. "Certain pears of enormous size," he wrote, "weigh as much as ten pounds each." And he was astounded to see fires made out of black rocks that burned. Marco Polo had never seen coal before!

Marco and his father stayed in China for almost twenty years. Marco traveled all around China, seeing its great cities with their beautiful buildings and its tiny villages filled with peasants and farmers. When Marco Polo grew older, Kublai Khan put him in charge of governing different cities in his empire. He sometimes asked Marco to judge between Chinese officials who were arguing with each other. And once he even asked Marco to find out whether his soldiers were plotting against him.

When Marco and his father finally returned home, their relatives refused to let them in. Marco was now a man of forty,

and Niccolo had a white beard. And they were wearing ragged, dirty clothes. "You aren't Marco and Niccolo!" their relatives scoffed. "They've been dead for years! You're just beggars."

So Marco and Niccolo ripped open the seams of their coats. Jewels tumbled out: emeralds, rubies, and sapphires. The two men had worn their oldest clothes and had sewn their jewels into the seams so that robbers would not attack them. Finally, their relatives let them in. Marco and Niccolo had returned from China.

The Forbidden City of the Ming

Marco Polo was lucky to make his journey to China during the reign of Kublai Khan. The Great Khan wanted Europeans to come to his country, so he tried to make the Silk Road safe. But after the Great Khan's death, traveling to China became more and more difficult. The land between Europe and China itself had once been controlled by Kublai Khan and protected by his soldiers. But now other Mongol leaders divided this in-between land among themselves. They fought with each other over the borders of their new little kingdoms. Now there were wars all along the Silk Road. Merchants traveled to China less and less often—and then hardly at all.

Meanwhile, the new rulers of China, the emperors of the Ming dynasty, spent their time improving their own cities and palaces. One of these emperors, the emperor Yongle, built a palace right at the center of China's capital city, Beijing. He wanted this palace to show the beauty of Chinese architecture

and the skill of Chinese builders. The royal family would live in it. The emperor's home and all of his official buildings would be part of the palace. And no foreigner would ever be allowed to enter it. We call this palace the *Forbidden City* because it was as large as a small city, and because foreign visitors were forbidden to see it.

Yongle ordered construction to begin in 1421. The Forbidden City took fourteen years to build. Its walls were made from enormous stones that were cut from stone quarries outside of Beijing. The stones were too heavy for oxen to pull into the city—especially during the winter, when the roads were covered with frozen ruts. So the Chinese laborers dug a well every three or four hundred feet along the road. They poured water on the road and waited for it to freeze into ice, and then slid the stones along on the ice, right into Beijing.

The stone walls that surrounded the palace were thirty feet high. Inside these walls, the Chinese built 9,999 smaller buildings. These buildings are made not only out of stone, but out of hard red bricks made from rice and lime. The bricks are attached together with a cement made out of mashed rice and egg whites. These bricks have remained strong for centuries.

Yellow is the color of royalty in China, so the buildings were decorated with gold dragons and yellow paintings, and the roofs were covered with yellow tiles. Each building inside the Forbidden City had a special name. The largest buildings, where the emperor worked on the business of ruling his country, were called the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Hall of Military Might, the Hall of Peace, and the Hall of Terrestrial Tranquility. The emperor's throne room was in the Hall of Celestial Purity, which had walls lacquered red, a marble floor, and golden carved dragons all around the walls.

The emperor himself lived in great luxury. He had entire buildings all to himself! He ate alone, waited on by dozens of servants. A food-taster stood beside him and took a bit of each dish before the emperor ate it, to make sure that none of the food was poisoned. The cooks of the Forbidden City would make roast chickens, roast deer, glazed duck, raised sweet buns, iced cakes, rice, several kinds of soup, a dozen vegetables and wine for every meal, just for this one man. There was so much food at each one of the emperor's meals that his leftovers were served to the others who lived in the palace.

The emperor's family and other relations also lived inside the Forbidden City. A royal child could grow up inside the Forbidden City and never need to leave. Children could spend their time doing lessons, but also painting, flying kites, ice skating, and playing with pet birds. They could go see plays and concerts, performed for them in a special theatre called the Pavilion of Cheerful Melodies. But they probably had the most fun raising crickets. Special pet crickets were kept in cricket cages and taken for walks on narrow leashes made of thread. Cricket-fights were held to find out whose cricket was the strongest. In a museum in China, you can still see the cricket-cages owned by the last emperors of China when they were children!

Even though foreigners were kept from coming into the Forbidden City to see the emperor Yongle, Yongle wanted to know more about the rest of the world. He ordered ships built, and paid Chinese explorers to go out on expeditions to distant lands. The explorers sailed thousands of miles. One ship may even have made it all the way to North America!

But the Ming emperors who came after Yongle didn't *want* to discover new and distant lands. They believed that China

was already the best country in the world. They thought that Chinese art and science was already perfect, and that the Chinese way of living couldn't possibly be improved. So instead of trading with the outside world, or sending Chinese people to start new settlements in different countries, the Ming emperors made the Great Wall even stronger, to protect against invaders—and stayed home. One of the emperors even made it illegal to build ocean-going ships. He told sailors that anyone who tried to sail to other countries and trade with them would be executed.

The Ming emperors lived in the Forbidden City, separated from the rest of the world, for centuries. About ninety years ago, the last Chinese emperors were driven out of the Forbidden City. Some of the buildings were destroyed. But today, the Forbidden City has been restored and rebuilt. Tourists can go see the palace that no medieval traveler ever saw.