

For use with Unit 3

New Empires and New Faiths

With the growth of new empires came great change. Events occurred that gave people the chance to be great leaders and heroes. New faiths continued to form new ideas.

Reader's Dictionary

cognizant: aware

trifling: insignificant

posterity: future time

allay: calm

incurred: brought upon oneself

Incense burner from the Byzantine Empire in the shape of a church



A Woman on the Throne



In 1081 an able general named Alexius Comnenus captured Constantinople. As Emperor Alexius I, he defended the Byzantine Empire against attacks from invaders. His daughter, Anna Comnena, retold the story of his reign in a book called *The Alexiad* (uh • lehk • see • uhd). She begins her account by describing Alexius's decision to turn the government over to his mother Anna Dalassena.

He really longed that his mother rather than himself should take the helm of the state, but so far he had concealed this design [plan] from her, fearing that if she became **cognizant** of it, she might actually leave the palace [for a convent]. . . . Therefore in all daily business he did nothing, not even a **trifling** thing, without her advice . . . and made her a partner in the administration of affairs, sometimes too he would say openly that without her brain and judgement the Empire would go to pieces.

. . . she was perhaps more devoted to her son than most women. And so she wished to help her son. . . . She ruled . . . with the Emperor, her son, and at times even took the reins alone and drove the chariot of Empire without harm or mishap. For besides being clever she had in very truth a kingly mind, capable of governing a kingdom.

A Heroic Rescue Attempt



Pliny the Elder—a Roman admiral and well-known author and scientist—died attempting to rescue people trapped at the foot of Mt. Vesuvius when it erupted. His nephew, Pliny the Younger, recorded his uncle's death in a letter written to a Roman historian named Tacitus. The letter forms an eyewitness account of the eruption and expresses Roman views of courage and duty.

Thank you for asking me to send you a description of my uncle's death so that you can leave an accurate account of it for **posterity**; . . .

As he was leaving the house he was handed a message from Rectina, . . . whose house was at the foot of the mountain, so that escape was impossible except by boat. She was terrified by the danger threatening her and implored him to rescue her. . . . Ashes were already falling, hotter and thicker as the ships drew near. . . . For a moment my uncle wondered whether to turn back, but when the helmsman advised this he refused, telling him that Fortune stood by the courageous. . . . This wind was . . . in my uncle's favour, and he was able to bring his ship in.

Meanwhile on Mount Vesuvius broad sheets of fire and leaping flames blazed at several points. . . . My uncle tried to **allay** the fears of his companions. . . . They debated whether to stay indoors or take their chance in the open,

for the buildings were now shaking with violent shocks, and seemed to be swaying. . . .

. . . A sheet was spread on the ground for him [uncle] to lie down, and he repeatedly asked for cold water to drink. Then the flames and smell of sulphur which gave warning of the approaching fire drove the others to take flight. . . . He stood . . . and then suddenly collapsed, I imagine because the dense fumes choked his breathing. . . . When daylight returned on the 26th—two days after the last day he had seen—his body was found. . . .

The Quran



The Quran is the holy book of Islam. The verses below come from Chapter 1, verses 2–7.

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds,
The Compassionate, the Merciful,
Master of the Day of Judgement,
Only You do we worship, and only You
do we implore for help.
Lead us to the right path,
The path of those You have favoured
Not those who have **incurred** Your wrath or
have gone astray.

Document Based Questions

1. Why did Alexius conceal his plans to turn the government over to his mother?
2. Why did Pliny the Elder sail to Mt. Vesuvius?
3. Does Pliny the Younger consider his uncle a hero? Why or why not?
4. Who is the quote from the Quran praising?