The Story of Civilization, by husband and wife Will and Ariel Durant, is an eleven-volume set of books covering Western history for the general reader. The volumes sold well for many years, and sets of them were frequently offered by book clubs.

The series was written over a span of more than four decades, and it totals four million words across nearly 10,000 pages, but is incomplete. In the first volume (Our Oriental Heritage, which covers the history of the East through 1933), Will Durant stated that he wanted to include the history of the West through the early 20th century. However, the series ends with The Age of Napoleon because the Durants both died in the 1980s â€“ she in her 80s and he in his 90s â€“ before they could complete additional volumes.

The first six volumes of The Story of Civilization are credited to Will Durant, with Ariel receiving recognition in the acknowledgements. In later volumes, beginning with The Age of Reason Begins, Ariel is credited as a co-author.

I. Our Oriental Heritage (1935)

This volume covers Near Eastern history until the fall of the Persian Empire in the 330s BC, and the history of India, China, and Japan up to the 1930s.

“Every chapter, every paragraph in this book will offend or amuse some patriotic or esoteric soul: the orthodox Jew will need all his ancestral patience to forgive the pages on Yahveh; the metaphysical Hindu will mourn this superficial scratching of Indian philosophy; The Chinese or Japanese sage will smile indulgently at these brief and inadequate selections from the wealth of Far Eastern literature and thought. … Meanwhile a weary author may sympathize with Tai T’ung, who in the thirteenth century issued his ‘History of Chinese Writing’ with these words: ‘Were I to await perfection, my book would never be finished.’” (p.ix)

1. The Establishment of Civilization
   1. The Conditions of Civilization
   2. The Economic Elements of Civilization
   3. The Political Elements of Civilization
   4. The Moral Elements of Civilization
   5. The Mental Elements of Civilization
   6. The Prehistoric Beginnings of Civilization

“The moulders of the world’s myths were unsuccessful husbands, for they agreed that woman was the source of all evil.” (page 70)

2. The Near East
   1. Sumer
   2. Egypt
   3. Babylonia
   4. Assyria
   5. A Motley of Nations
For barbarism is always around civilization, amid it and beneath it, ready to engulf it by arms, or mass migration, or unchecked fertility. Barbarism is like the jungle; it never admits its defeat; it waits patiently for centuries to recover the territory it has lost. 

On the fall of India to the Moguls: "The bitter lesson that may be drawn from this tragedy is that eternal vigilance is the price of civilization. A nation must love peace, but keep its powder dry." 

On China in 1935: "No victory of arms, or tyranny of alien finance, can long suppress a nation so rich in resources and vitality. The invader will lose funds or patience before the loins of China will lose virility; within a century China will have absorbed and civilized her conquerors, and will have learned all the technique of what transiently bears the name of modern industry; roads and communications will give her unity, economy and thrift will give her funds, and a strong government will give her order and peace."

On Japan in 1935: "By every historical precedent the next act will be war."

The realization of self-government was something new in the world; life without kings had not yet been dared by any great society. Out of this proud sense of independence, individual and collective, came a powerful stimulus to every enterprise of the Greeks; it was their liberty that
inspired them to incredible accomplishments in arts and letters, in science and philosophy.*
(p. 233)

3. The Golden Age: 480â€“399 BC
   1. Pericles and the Democratic Experiment
   2. Work and Wealth in Athens
   3. The Morals and Manners of the Athenians
   4. The Art of Periclean Greece
   5. The Advancement of Learning
   6. The Conflict of Philosophy and Religion
   7. The Literature of the Golden Age
   8. The Suicide of Greece

   "As surprising as anything else in this civilization is the fact that it was brilliant without the aid or
   stimulus of women." (p. 305)

4. The Decline and Fall of Greek Freedom: 399â€“322 BC
   1. Philip
   2. Letters and Arts in the Fourth Century
   3. The Zenith of Philosophy
   4. Alexander

   "The class war had turned democracy into a contest in legislative looting." (p. 554)

5. The Hellenistic Dispersion: 322â€“146 BC
   1. Greece and Macedon
   2. Hellenism and the Orient
   3. Egypt and the West
   4. Books
   5. The Art of the Dispersion
   6. The Climax of Greek Science
   7. The Surrender of Philosophy
   8. The Coming of Rome

   â€œWe have tried to show that the essential cause of the Roman conquest of Greece was the
   disintegration of Greek civilization from within. No great nation is ever conquered until it has
   destroyed itself.â€ (p. 659)

Epilogue: Our Greek Heritage

III. Caesar and Christ (1944)

The volume covers the history of Rome and of Christianity until the time of Constantine the Great.

1. Introduction: Origins
   1. Etruscan Prelude: 800â€“508 BC

2. The Republic: 508â€“30 BC
   1. The Struggle for Democracy: 508â€“264 BC
   4. The Greek Conquest: 201 BC-146 BC

   â€œThe new generation, having inherited world mastery, had no
time or inclination to defend it; that readiness for war which had
characterized the Roman landowner disappeared now that
ownership was concentrated in a few families and a proletariat
without stake in the country filled the slums of Rome.â€ (p. 90)

3. The Revolution: 145â€“30 BC
   1. The Agrarian Revolt: 145â€“78 BC
   2. The Oligarchic Reaction: 77â€“60 BC
   3. Literature Under the Revolution: 145â€“30 BC
   4. Caesar: 100â€“44 BC
Children were now luxuries which only the poor could afford. (p. 134)

If Rome had not engulfed so many men of alien blood in so brief a time, if she had passed all these newcomers through her schools instead of her slums, if she had treated them as men with a hundred potential excellences, if she had occasionally closed her gates to let assimilation catch up with infiltration, she might have gained new racial and literary vitality from the infusion, and might have remained a Roman Rome, the voice and citadel of the West. (p. 366)

Rome was not destroyed by Christianity, any more than by barbarian invasion; it was an empty shell when Christianity rose to influence and invasion came. (p. 667-668)

IV. The Age of Faith (1950)

This volume covers the Middle Ages in both Europe and the Near East, from the time of Constantine to that of Dante Alighieri.

1. The Byzantine Zenith: AD 325-565
   1. Julian the Apostate: 332-63
   2. The Triumph of the Barbarians: 325-476
   3. The Progress of Christianity: 364-451
   4. Europe Takes Form: 325-529
   5. Justinian: 527-65
   6. Byzantine Civilization: 337-565
   7. The Persians: 224-641
   "Historically, the conquest destroyed the outward form of what had already inwardly decayed; it cleared away with regrettable brutality and thoroughness a system of life which, with all its gifts of order, culture, and law, had worn itself into senile debility, and had lost the powers of regeneration and growth." (p. 43)

2. Islamic Civilization: AD 569-1258
   1. Mohammed: 569-632
   2. The Koran
3. The Sword of Islam: 632â€“1058
4. The Islamic Scene: 632â€“1058
5. Thought and Art in Eastern Islam: 632â€“1058
6. Western Islam: 641â€“1086
7. The Grandeur and Decline of Islam: 1058â€“1258

"Moslems seem to have been better gentlemen than their Christian peers; they kept their word more frequently, showed more mercy to the defeated, and were seldom guilty of the brutality as marked the Christian capture of Jerusalem in 1099." (p. 341)

3. Judaic Civilization: AD 135-1300
   1. The Talmud: 135â€“500
   2. The Medieval Jews: 500â€“1300
   3. The Mind and Heart of the Jew: 500â€“1300

4. The Dark Ages: AD 566â€“1095
   1. The Byzantine World: 566â€“1095
   2. The Decline of the West: 566â€“1066
   3. The Rise of the North: 566â€“1066
   4. Christianity in Conflict: 529â€“1085
   5. Feudalism and Chivalry: 600â€“1200

5. The Climax of Christianity: 1095â€“1300
   1. The Crusades: 1095â€“1291
   2. The Economic Revolution: 1066â€“1300
   3. The Recovery of Europe: 1095â€“1300
   4. Pre-Renaissance Italy: 1057â€“1308
   5. The Roman Catholic Church: 1095â€“1294
   6. The Early Inquisition: 1000â€“1300
   7. Monks and Friars: 1095â€“1300
   8. The Morals and Manners of Christendom: 700â€“1300
   9. The Resurrection of the Arts: 1095â€“1300
   10. The Gothic Flowering: 1095â€“1300
   11. Medieval Music: 326â€“1300
   12. The Transmission of Knowledge: 1000â€“1300
   13. Abelard: 1079â€“1142
   14. The Adventure of Reason: 1120â€“1308
   15. Christian Science: 1095â€“1300
   16. The Age of Romance: 1100â€“1300
   17. Dante: 1265â€“1321

"All in all, the picture we form of the medieval Latin Church is that of a complex organization doing its best, despite the human frailties of its adherents and leaders, to establish moral and social order, and to spread an uplifting and consoling faith, amid the wreckage of an old civilization and the passions of an adolescent society." (p. 818)

Epilogue: The Medieval Legacy

V. The Renaissance (1953)

This volume covers the history of Italy from c.1300 to the mid 16th century, focusing on the Italian Renaissance.

1. Prelude: 1300â€“77
   1. The Age of Petrarch and Boccaccio: 1304â€“75
   2. The Popes in Avignon: 1309â€“77

"Venetian merchants invaded every market from Jerusalem to Antwerp; they traded impartially with Christians and Mohammedans, and papal excommunications fell upon them with all the
"But it took more than a revival of antiquity to make the Renaissance. And first of all it took money—smelly bourgeois money: ... of careful calculations, investments and loans, of interest and dividends accumulated until surplus could be spared from the pleasures of the flesh, from the purchase of senates, signories, and mistresses, to pay a Michaelangelo or a Titian to transmute wealth into beauty, and perfume a fortune with the breath of art. Money is the root of all civilization." (p. 67-68)

"He was not handsome; like most great men, he was spared this distracting handicap." (p. 185)
### VII. The Age of Reason Begins (1961)

This volume covers the history of Europe and the Near East from 1559 to 1648.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. The English Ecstasy: 1558â€“1648</th>
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<td>5. Mary, Queen of Scots: 1542â€“87</td>
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<td>7. The Summons to Reason: 1558â€“1649</td>
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<td>8. The Great Rebellion: 1625â€“49</td>
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People then, as now, were judged more by their manners than by their morals; the world forgave more readily the sins that were committed with the least vulgarity and the greatest grace.

Here, as in everything but artillery and theology, Italy led the way.â€ (p. 766)
Witches were burned, and Jesuits were taken down from the scaffold to be cut to pieces alive. The milk of human kindness flowed sluggishly in the days of Good Queen Bess. (p. 54)

2. The Faiths Fight For Power: 1556â€“1648
   1. Alma Mater Italia: 1564â€“1648
   2. Grandeur and Decadence of Spain: 1556â€“1665
   3. The Golden Age of Spanish Literature: 1556â€“1665
   4. The Golden Age of Spanish Art: 1556â€“1682
   5. The Duel for France: 1559â€“174
   6. Henry IV: 1553â€“1610
   7. Richelieu: 1585â€“1642
   8. France Beneath the Wars: 1559â€“1643
   9. The Revolt of the Netherlands: 1558â€“1648
   10. From Rubens to Rembrandt: 1555â€“1660
   11. The Rise of the North: 1559â€“1648
   12. The Islamic Challenge: 1556â€“1648
   13. Imperial Aramageddon: 1564â€“1648

"The stones in his bladder bothered him more than the wars of France." (p. 411)

3. The Tentatives of Reason: 1558â€“1648
   1. Science in the Age of Galileo: 1558â€“1648
   2. Philosophy Reborn: 1564â€“1648

"Is Christianity dying? ... If this is so, it is the basic event of modern times, for the soul of a civilization is its religion, and it dies with its faith." (p. 613)

VIII. The Age of Louis XIV (1963)

This volume covers the period of Louis XIV of France in Europe and the Near East.

1. The French Zenith: 1643â€“1715
   1. The Sun Rises: 1643â€“1715
   2. The Crucible of Faith: 1643â€“1715
   3. The King and the Arts: 1643â€“1715
   4. Molière: 1622â€“173
   5. The Classic Zenith in French Literature: 1643â€“1715
   6. Tragedy in the Netherlands: 1649â€“1715

â€œIt was an age of strict manners and loose morals.â€
   (p. 27)

â€œLike the others, he came from the middle class; the aristocracy is too interested in the art of life to spare time for the life of art.â€ (p. 144)

1. England: 1649â€“1714
   1. Cromwell: 1649â€“1660
   2. Milton: 1608â€“174
   3. The Restoration: 1660â€“1685
   4. The Glorious Revolution: 1685â€“1714
   5. From Dryden to Swift: 1660â€“1714

2. The Periphery: 1648â€“1715
   1. The Struggle for the Baltic: 1648â€“1721
   2. Peter the Great: 1698â€“1725
   3. The Changing Empire: 1648â€“1715
   4. The Fallow South: 1648â€“1715
   5. The Jewish Enclaves: 1564â€“1715

3. The Intellectual Adventure: 1648â€“1715
   1. From Superstition to Scholarship: 1648â€“1715
   2. The Scientific Quest: 1648â€“1715
IX. The Age of Voltaire (1965)

This volume covers the period of the Age of Enlightenment, as exemplified by Voltaire, focusing on the period between 1715 and 1756 in France, Britain, and Germany.

1. France: The Regency
2. England: 1714â€“56
   1. The People
   2. The Rulers
   3. Religion and Philosophy
   4. Literature and the Stage
   5. Art and Music
3. France: 1723â€“56
   1. The People and the State
   2. Morals and Manners
   3. The Worship of Beauty
   4. The Play of the Mind
   5. Voltaire in France
   â€œWomen, when on display, dressed as in our wondering youth, when the female structure was a breathless mystery costly to behold.â€
   (p. 75)
4. Middle Europe: 1713â€“56
   1. The Germany of Bach
   2. Frederick the Great and Maria Theresa
   3. Switzerland and Voltaire
5. The Advancement of Learning: 1715â€“89
   1. The Scholars
   2. The Scientific Advance
   3. Medicine
6. The Attack Upon Christianity: 1730â€“74
   1. The Atheists
   2. Diderot and the Encyclopedie
   3. Diderot Proteus
   4. The Spreading Campaign
   5. Voltaire and Christianity
   6. The Triumph of the Philosophes

X. Rousseau and Revolution (1967)

This volume centers on Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his times. It received the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction in 1968.

1. Prelude
   1. Rousseau Wanderer: 1712â€“56
   2. The Seven Years' War: 1756â€“63
2. France Before the Deluge: 1757â€“74
1. The Life of the State
2. The Art of Life
5. Rousseau: Philosopher

3. The Catholic South: 1715â€“89
   1. Italia Felix: 1715â€“59
   2. Portugal and Pombal: 1706â€“62
   3. Spain and the Enlightenment: 1700â€“88
   5. The Enlightenment in Austria: 1756â€“90
   6. Music Reformed
   7. Mozart
      "Lovers under a window plucked at a guitar or mandolin and a maiden’s heart.â€”(p. 220)

4. Islam and the Slavic East: 1715â€“96
   1. Islam: 1715â€“96
   2. Russian Interlude: 1725â€“62
   3. Catherine the Great: 1762â€“96
   4. The Rape of Poland: 1715â€“95

5. The Protestant North: 1756â€“89
   1. Frederick's Germany: 1756â€“86
   2. Kant: 1724â€“1804
   3. Roads to Weimar: 1733â€“87
   4. Weimar in Flower: 1775â€“1805
   5. Goethe Nestor: 1805â€“32
   6. The Jews: 1715â€“96
   7. Johnson's England: 1756â€“89
      "He concluded that history is an excellent teacher with few pupils." (p. 529)
   8. Johnson's England: 1709â€“84

   1. The Industrial Revolution
   2. The Political Drama: 1756â€“92
   3. The English People: 1756â€“89
   4. The Age of Reynolds: 1756â€“90
   5. England's Neighbors: 1756â€“89
   6. The Literary Scene: 1756â€“89
   7. Samuel Johnson: 1709â€“84

7. The Collapse of Feudal France: 1774â€“89
   1. The Final Glory: 1774â€“83
   2. Death and the Philosophers: 1774â€“1807
   3. On the Eve: 1774â€“89
   4. The Anatomy of Revolution: 1774â€“89
   5. The Political Debacle: 1783â€“89

8. Envoi

XI. The Age of Napoleon (1975)

This volume centers on Napoleon I of France and his times.

   1. The Background of Revolution: 1774â€“89
   2. The National Assembly: May 4, 1789 â€“ September 30, 1791
   3. The Legislative Assembly: October 1, 1791 â€“ September 20, 1792
   4. The Convention: September 21, 1792 â€“ October 26, 1795
   5. The Directory: November 2, 1795 â€“ November 9, 1799
2. Napoleon Ascendant: 1799â€“1811
   1. The Consulate: November 11, 1799 â€“ May 18, 1804
   2. The New Empire: 1804â€“07
   3. The Mortal Realm: 1807â€“11
   4. Napoleon Himself
   5. Napoleonic France: 1800â€“1815
   6. Napoleon and the Arts
   7. Literature versus Napoleon
   8. Science and Philosophy under Napoleon
   "It was a typical Napoleonic campaign: swift, victorious, and futile." (p. 228)

3. Britain: 1789â€“1812
   1. England at Work
   2. English Life
   3. The Arts in England
   4. Science in England
   5. English Philosophy
   6. Literature in Transition
   7. The Lake Poets: 1770â€“1850
   8. The Rebel Poets: 1788â€“1824

4. The Challenged Kings: 1789â€“1812
   1. Iberia
   2. Italy and Its Conquerors: 1789â€“1813
   3. Austria: 1780â€“1812
   4. Beethoven: 1770â€“1827
   5. Germany and Napoleon: 1786â€“1811
   6. The German People: 1789â€“1812
   7. German Literature: 1789â€“1815
   8. German Philosophy: 1789â€“1815
   9. Around the Heartland: 1789â€“1812
   10. Russia: 1796â€“1812
   "... she entered upon a series of adventures, in one of which she was surprised with motherhood." (p. 633)

5. Finale: 1811â€“1815
   1. To Moscow: 1811â€“12
   2. To Elba: 1813â€“14
   3. To Waterloo: 1814â€“15
   4. To St. Helena
   5. To the End
   6. Afterward: 1815â€“40

Criticism

The Story of Civilization has been criticized by some for simplifications, rash judgments colored by personal convictions, and allegedly careless dabbling in historical scholarship.

The counter to such criticism is that Durantâ€™s purpose in writing the series was not to create a definitive scholarly production but to make a large amount of information accessible and comprehensible to the educated public in the form of a comprehensive "composite history." Given the massive undertaking in creating these 11 volumes over 50 years, errors and incompleteness were inevitable by Durant’s own reckoning; but no other historical survey matches let alone exceeds the breadth and depth of his project.

As Durant says in the preface to his first work, Our Oriental Heritage:
The Complete Story of Civilization by Will Durant represents the most comprehensive attempt in our times to embrace the vast panorama of man’s history and culture. This eleven-volume set includes: Volume One - Our Oriental Heritage; Volume Two - The Life of Greece; Volume Three - Caesar and Christ; Volume Four - The Age of Faith; Volume Five - The Renaissance; Volume Six - The Reformation; Volume Seven - The Age of Reason Begins; Volume Eight - The Age of Louis XIV; Volume Nine - The Age of Voltaire; Volume Ten - Rousseau and Revolution; Volume Eleven - The Age of Napoleon. The Durants are attempting the impossible: The Story of Civilization. I'm not a historian so I can't speak to the academic quality of Durant's writing; I don't know what he left-out or glossed-over. My response to his piece titled "What is Civilization?" is here. Nothing in this volume, however, seems to be born from a desire to conform to any religious dogma, although he does tell the Moses story as if we know it's factual. But he also writes: "As they entered the historic scene the Jews were nomad Bedouins who feared the djinns of the air, and worshiped rocks, cattle, sheep, and the spirits of caves and hill." One other of his sentences that seemed dated to me was "The greatest task of morals is always sexual regulation." The book has been described as The Story of Civilization has 1,359 ratings and 136 reviews. Karen said: I read all 11 volumes of this series when I was housebound with 3 kids (2 of who... Â Goodreads helps you keep track of books you want to read. Start by marking â€œThe Story of Civilization (11 Volume Set)â€ as Want to Read: Want to Read savingâ€¦ Want to Read. Currently Reading. Read. Other editions. Enlarge cover.