

UNIT

6

The Middle Ages



Learning Objectives

- To learn about the empires of China during the reign of Tang, Sung and Yuan dynasties
- To understand the evolution of Japanese society under the Fujiwara Family and Kamakura Shogunate
- To trace the background of the birth of Islam
- To acquire knowledge of Arab and Ottoman Empires and their contribution to the spread of Islamic culture
- To analyse the characteristics of Feudalism in the Middle Ages
- To understand the relationship between the State and the Church in the Middle Ages



Introduction

Historians call the period between the end of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D. (C.E.) and the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 A.D. (C.E.) as the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages has been further classified as early, central or high and later. In the early Middle Ages (approximately fifth to tenth century), Christianity, followed by Islam, began to establish themselves as dominant religions of continental Europe. The central or high Middle Ages witnessed rapid development, marked by territorial expansion, demographic and urban

growth, and the restructuring of secular and religious institutions.

The history of Arab civilisation that began a little later than the history of Byzantium covers a period roughly from 630 A.D. (C.E.) to 1300. Known as Saracenic civilisation it was the centre of a new religion and its impact on Christian Europe was responsible for revolutionary social and intellectual changes.

Seljuq Turks were a tribe of Tartars from Central Asia. They established a powerful empire in Persia. Their reign was one of great

progress in literature, art and architecture. Similarly the Ottoman Turks who moved Anatolia (Asia Minor) and established an independent empire contributed to science and technology in a big way.

EAST ASIA IN THE MIDDLE AGES

6.1 China: Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D. (C.E.))

Sui dynasty collapsed in forty years because of financial burden imposed by public works like the Grand Canal and the expensive wars waged to conquer northern part of Korea. The T'ang dynasty rose from the widespread rebellions that took place to establish a strong centralised empire. Li Yuan who organised the rebellion made Yang You the emperor of China. As Yang you was killed by one of his royal officials, the Chancellor, Li Yuan proclaimed himself emperor. Several hundred kilometres of the Great Wall were rebuilt along the north-west frontiers. Military campaigns extended the empire's influence into Korea in the east and as far as the borders of Persia and Indo-China in the west.

Great Wall of China:

Between 8th and 7th centuries B.C. (BCE), the warring states in China built



defensive walls to protect themselves from enemies from the north. During Chin (Qin) Dynasty, the separate walls were connected and consequently the wall stretched from east to west for about 5000 kilometres. This wall, considered to be one of the wonders of the world, served to keep nomadic tribes out. The Wall was further extended and strengthened by the succeeding dynasties. Now it is 6,700 kilometres in length.

Tang dynasty undertook enormous public works. Two capital cities, Boyang and Chang-on, were built. Scholar officials, trained in Confucius Philosophy, were appointed to counterbalance the landowning aristocratic class. Land was divided into small peasant holdings. As a result, the agricultural surplus went to the state as taxes, not to the aristocrats as rents. State monopoly of salt, and tea added to its revenues.

Sung Dynasty (960–1279 A.D. (C.E.))

The rebellion of hard-pressed peasantry under the leadership of Hung Ch'ao dealt a death knell to the tottering Tang empire. The empire split into five rival states, until it was reunited under a new dynasty, Sung. Trade and industry flourished during the reign of Sung dynasty. Iron and steel industries became highly organized.

The quantity of iron China produced in 1078 A.D. (C.E.) exceeded 114,000 tons (England produced only 68,000 tons even in 1788). China excelled in ceramics and porcelain-making. This technique was not known to Europe for another 700 years. Gun powder was in use by 1044. China possessed printed books half a millennium before Europe. (Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World*, p. 111.)



Fall of Sung Dynasty

Sung period was also a period of great prosperity to the landowning class, officials and rich merchants. The peasants, by contrast, had to suffer grinding poverty. Before any internal crisis could develop, there were two external invasions from the north that ended the Sung dynasty. The



Mongols established their rule in the name of Yuan dynasty.

Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368 A.D. (C.E.))

The Mongols, who overran Persia and the whole of Central Asia, did not spare China either. Mangu Khan became the Great Khan in 1252 who appointed Kublai Khan the Governor of China. The Mongol presence from one end of Eurasia to the other played a key role in spreading Chinese technological advances to the less developed societies in the west. Though the Mongol court in Beijing impressed a foreigner like Marco Polo, the poverty of peasantry continued. There were revolts of religious sects and secret societies. Finally, the leader of “**Red Turbans**” Chu Yuan Chang captured the Mongol capital, Beijing and proclaimed himself emperor in 1369.



Kublai Khan



Mongol Court

Ming Empire (1368–1644 A.D. (C.E.))

The Ming Empire, which replaced the Mongol empire, consciously discouraged industry and foreign trade in order to concentrate on agriculture. This resulted, economically China lagging behind in the 16th century. Other parts of Eurasia, building on the techniques of the Chinese, began to march ahead.

6.2 Japan

Many of ancestors of the Japanese came from Korea and some from Malaysia. It was through Korea that Chinese civilisation reached Yamato (Yamato was the original name of Japan). The original inhabitants of the

country (aborigines) are known as “Ainus.” The original religion of Japan was Shinto. It was a mixture of nature and ancestor worship.

Japan remained in isolation for many centuries. This gave them the benefit of enjoying freedom from the foreign invasions. In Japan Buddhism came through Korea.



Shinto Religion

In Japan also the leading families opposed and fought each other to gain power. Their emperor Mikado was an autocrat but a puppet in the hands of a few powerful families. The first great family that controlled the state was the Soga family. Shotoku Taishi was the leader. He made the central government strong.

After the death of Shotoku Taishi, his family was driven out by Nakatom no Kamatari, the founder of the Fujiwara family. Kamatari adopted many Chinese methods and made the central government further strong. He made Nara the capital. From 794 AD (CE) Kyoto remained the capital for more than one thousand years until it was replaced by Tokyo. Fujiwara family emperors in later years retired to monasteries and lived as monks. Yet they continued to exercise authority.

During the two-hundred-year rule of Fujiwaras, a new class of large landholders emerged. These landholders were also military men, called Daimyos (meaning great names-lords). The Daimyos became powerful with their retainers and armies. Out of the fight between two chief families, the Taira and the Minamoto, Yoritomo emerged successful. In AD (CE) 1192, the emperor gave him the high sounding title of Sei-i-tai-Shogun, which means the Barbarian-

subduing-Great-General. The title carried full power to govern hereditarily. The Shogun became the real ruler. In this way began the rule of Shogunate.

Yoritomo established his military capital at Kamakura. Therefore, the first Shogunate is called the Kamakura Shogunate. Japan followed China in all spheres of life but in its own way. The emperor became a ceremonial head. The government was a feudal military government administered by *samurai* or warriors. The Mongols, who changed the course of history in Asia and terrified Europe, were successfully repulsed by the Japanese under this Shogunate. Yet the decline of the ruling dynasty started and in 1338 AD (CE), the Kamakura Shogunate ended. A new line of Shogunate came to power known as Ashikaga Shogunate that lasted for 235 years. But this was a period of conflict and war. Three men ultimately rescued Japan from the prolonged civil war. They were Borbunaga, a Daimyo or noble, Hideyoshi, a peasant and Tokugawa Iyeyasu, one of the distinguished nobles of the time. By the end of 16th century the whole of Japan was again united.

6.3 Islam and the Rise of Islamic Empires

Prophet Mohammad established Islam. Islam gave a message of brotherhood. Mohammad laid stress on the equality of all those who were Muslims. This message of equality and brotherhood had great appeal not only for the Arabs, who were divided into warring tribes, but also for people in other parts of the world. However, faced with persecution in his place of birth, Mohammad and his followers moved to the city of Yethrib. The flight of Mohammad from Mecca in 622 AD (CE) is called *Hijrah* in Arabic. In honour of his coming, the people of Yethrib renamed the city to Madinat-un-Nabi-the city of the Prophet. It is now known as Medina. Mohammad died ten years after the *Hijrat* (AD (CE) 632). By the time of his death, united under a common faith, the Arabs became a powerful force.



Mecca

6.3 (a) Arabian

Abu Bakr and Omar who succeeded Prophet Mohammad as *Khalif or Caliph* (both religious and temporal leader) laid the foundation for an Islamic Empire. In a short period of time, the Arabs defeated both the Eastern Roman Empire and the Sassanid King of Persia. Jerusalem, the holy city of Jews and Christians, was won by the Arabs, and the whole of Spain and Persia came under the new Arab Empire.

Islam advocated simplicity and equality. These two ideas impressed people fed up with the old order of oppression and exploitation. The Arabs easily overran many regions. Egyptians had suffered much under the Roman Empire and so they opted for Arabs. Led by the General Tariq, the Arabs, after conquering Morocco and Africa, crossed into Europe and took Spain which they ruled for many hundreds of years. The Arabs, until then largely nomads from the deserts, became the rulers of a mighty empire. They were called Saracens (from *sahra* and *nashin* - the dwellers of the desert).

Birth of Sunni and Shia Sects

The quarrel for the leadership of Arabia led to a division in Islam. The two sects formed out of the division were the Sunnis and Shias. The Sunnites, Sunni Muslims, maintained that the head of the Islamic state and successor to the Prophet should be elected by representatives of the whole body of believers. The Shiites, the followers of Shia sect, opposed elevation to any highest political and religious office other than those related to the Prophet by blood or by marriage.

Rule of Ommiad or Umayyad dynasty

The Caliphs, belonging to a branch of Mohammad's family, known as Ommiads or Umayyads ruled for about 100 years. Damascus was their capital. They developed a new style of architecture known as Saracenic architecture. The arches, the pillars, and the minarets and domes came to India later and blended with Indian ideas.



Saracenic Architecture

The Muslim Arabs carried Islam far and wide. But while they were fighting at distant lands, the Arabs at home were quarrelling. Ali, the son-in-law of Prophet Mohammad and his son Hussein were murdered. **Umayyads** were overthrown by Abbasids. This branch descended from Prophet Mohammad's uncle Abbas and hence his followers were called Abbasids.

Rule of Abbasids

Abbasid rule began in 750 A.D. (C.E.) assuming the title of "the Commander of the Faithful", Abbasid Caliph wielded authority as any other Emperor. The Abbasids tried to rival the old empires in splendour. The capital was shifted from Damascus to Baghdad in Iraq.



Baghdad City

Baghdad- a city known as the city of Arabian Nights, 'was a vast city of palaces and public offices and schools and colleges, and great shops and parks and gardens. The merchants carried on a vast trade with the East and West.... Visitors came to Baghdad from all over the world, especially learned men and students and artists Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*.

Arabs' Scholarly Pursuits

Abbasid Caliphs did not attempt to conquer new lands. Instead they tried to consolidate the Empire. They were more interested in scholarly pursuits. The Arabs had a scientific spirit of inquiry. In some subjects like medicine and mathematics they learnt much more from India. Many students from Arabia went to Taxila to learn Medical Education, By that time Taxila was a popular Medical University. Indian scholars and mathematicians came in large numbers to Baghdad. Sanskrit books on medicine and other subjects were translated into Arabic. In medicine and surgery, Arab physicians and surgeons earned a great reputation.

6.3 (b) Disintegration of Arab Empire and Rise of Seljuq Turks

The Abbasid Empire was at the height of its glory during the reign of Harun-al-Rashid. Soon after his death, the Arab Empire started disintegrating. Independent kingdoms arose everywhere. The Caliph became more and more powerless to control those kingdoms. The Turks (known as Seljuq Turks), who had become Muslims, succeeded in taking possession of Baghdad. They also defeated the Byzantine army of Constantinople and posed a challenge to the European states. The Christian pilgrims to the holy city of Jerusalem were put to a lot of hardships by the Turks. The resultant conflict led to the Crusades.



6.3 (c) Crusades and Fall of Seljuq Turks

The Pope and the Church called upon all the Christian peoples of Europe to march to the rescue of the “holy city” (Jerusalem). The Crusaders had to fight against the Seljuq Turks who controlled those parts. The struggle between Christianity and Islam beginning in 1095 continued for nearly 200 years and is called the Crusades.

The Crusades did not achieve the desired end. Jerusalem continued to remain in Ottoman hands for another 700 years. This continuous fighting associated with Crusades weakened the Seljuq Turks. The Mongol invasion from the East side-lined this cause and Christians and Muslims alike started shifting their attention towards the advancing Mongols, led by **Chengiz Khan**. The destruction of Baghdad in 1258 A.D. (C.E.), by the Mongols, put an end to what remained of the Abbasid Empire.



Jerusalem

6.3 (d) Impact of Crusades

Crusades ended the feudal relations. Many of the nobles who went to East to take part in the Crusades either stayed too long a period or did not return. The serfs took advantage of their absence to break away from their bondage to the soil. Increasing demand for products of the East led to expansion of trade. *Venice*, *Genoa* and *Pisa* emerged as important commercial centres in the



Mediterranean region. Constantinople ceased to be the middle man in the trade between the East and the West. The elimination of powerful nobles had its influence in strengthening the monarchy in France and England. One notable outcome of Crusades was the loss of prestige suffered by Pope and Papacy.

Mongols and Chengiz Khan

Mongols were nomads. They were herdsmen. The Mongols were experts in warfare and produced a remarkable chief, Chengiz Khan. He was a great military genius. Mongols' hold over Russia for about 300 years made Russia technologically backward from the rest of Europe until the end of Middle Ages."



Chengiz Khan

6.4 Ottoman Empire

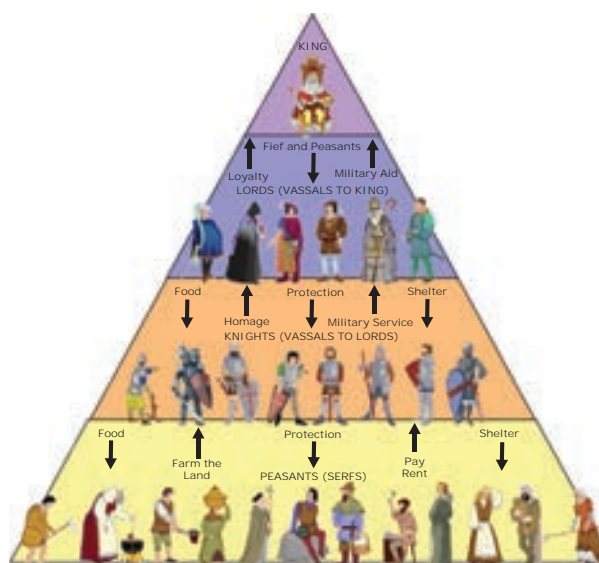
When the Mongols advanced across Asia, Ottoman Turks (different from Seljuq Turks) fled and took asylum under Seljuqs in western Asia. But when the Seljuq Turks weakened, the Ottomans extended their power. They crossed over to Europe and occupied Bulgaria and Serbia, and made Adrianople their capital. Instead of directly attacking Constantinople they surrounded it and were biding their time. The conquest of Constantinople in 1453 A.D. (C.E.) by Mohammad II, helped establish Ottoman supremacy in the Balkans, Black Sea and the Middle East.

For some time, Ottomans were strong and Christian Europe was scared of them. After conquering Egypt, they assumed the title of Caliph. They became a major player in the international power politics of the day. Though weakened during the 19th century it formally ended only with World War I.

6.5 Feudalism

6.5 (a) State

Despite the hold of powerful religions such as Christianity and Islam, the economic life of people was governed by feudal relations.



Feudalism

The king, supposed to represent God on earth, was at the head of the feudal regime. Immediately after him were the great nobles, known as dukes, counts, earls. The relationship was one of a vassal. The nobles in turn had vassals of their own, dividing and distributing their *fief* to lesser nobles called viscounts or barons. Last in this order were the knights, whose fiefs could not be divided. At the bottom were the villeins or serfs they are called slaves.

In the feudal system which centred around vassalage, there was no idea of equality or freedom. There were only rights and obligations. The Bishops, Abbots and Cardinals the priest next to pope Cardinals Bishops - religious head in district level Abbots -chief among the christian priest and the Church came under this socio-political structure. The nobility and the clergy did not do any physical work. So the burden of producing the food and other necessities of life fell on the peasants and artisans.

6.5 (b) Church

New elements were included in Christian theology. They were the theory of priesthood and the theory of sacraments. These two elements increased the power of the clergy.

Excommunication meant depriving a person of all the privileges of a Christian. He was denied the right to sacraments in Church. His or her body could not be buried in the consecrated ground. **Interdict** was to deny benefits of religion to a ruler's subject, intended to kindle their resentment against him.

The growth of the Church in the later Middle Ages was accompanied by the rise of ambitious political leaders. In the conflict between German Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII, Pope by means of Interdict succeeded in making the emperor to abdicate the throne. By means of interdict Pope Innocent III forced King John to recognize England and Ireland as fiefs of the papacy. Many pious Christians now began to resent Pope's intrusion into state affairs.

India in the Corresponding Period

The Huns

Around the time when Europe fragmented into multiple small Germanic kingdoms after the collapse of Roman Empire, the Huns (white), a fierce and warlike people from Central Asia, invaded Northeast India. Though they were repulsed by Skandagupta, they entered India after his death and settled all over Central India. Toramana and Mihirakula were the two well known Hun rulers in India. They persecuted Buddhists and burnt all the monasteries. Yasodharman of Malwa is credited to have ended the rule of Huns in India around 528 A.D.(CE).



Skandagupta's Gold Coin



Skandagupta's Silver Coin



Yashodharman Victory Pillar, Mandsaur

Chalukyas' (of Badami or Vadabi) relationship with Persia

The Chalukya kingdom existed contemporaneously with the rule of Sassanid dynasty in Persia. Khusrau II, the last great king of Sassanid dynasty, who had a close relationship with the Tang dynasty in China, and the Chalukya ruler Pulakesin II exchanged ambassadors. The Chalukya kingdom comprised the Maharashtra country with Badami as capital. Hiuen Tsang speaks highly of their courage. According to him, 'they are warlike and proud-spirited, grateful for favours and revengeful for wrongs'.





Recap

- China which rivalled Rome during the Christian era, after experiencing political instability, accomplished unity and was ruled by the Sung dynasty for about three centuries.
- Sung dynasty was overthrown by the Mongols who established Yuan dynasty in China.
- Japan, which remained in isolation, joined the mainstream in the sixth century AD (CE) with Mikado becoming its emperor. Japan followed China in all walks of life.
- The emperors slowly lost their control and the government was taken over by the military general, who founded the Kamakura Shogunate.
- Kamakura Shogunate was replaced by Ashikaga Shogunate.
- Islam, established by Prophet Mohammad, began to spread.
- Arabs who took to Islam early succeeded in establishing Islamic kingdom first in Spain and later in other parts of Europe.
- Umayyads ruled from Damascus, while the Abbasids from Baghdad.
- The fight for the leadership of Arabia after the death of Prophet Mohammad led to division in Islam as Sunni and Shia.
- The architecture developed by Arabs is known as Saracenic.
- The takeover of the holy city of Jerusalem by Seljuq Turks resulted in the Crusades.
- The weakening of Seljuq Turks led to the rise of Ottoman Turks.
- The capture of Constantinople by Ottoman Turks ended the Middle Ages.



EXERCISE



I. Choose the correct answer

1. _____ was the original religion of Japan
(a) Shinto
(b) Confucianism
(c) Taoism
(d) Animism
2. _____ means great name - lord.
(a) Daimyo (b) Shogun
(c) Fujiwara (d) Tokugawa
3. The Arab General who conquered Spain was _____
(a) Tariq (b) Alaric
(c) Saladin (d) Mohammad the Conqueror
4. Harun-al-Rashid was the able emperor of _____
(a) Abbasid dynasty
(b) Umayyad dynasty
(c) Sassanid dynasty
(d) Mongol dynasty
5. Feudalism centred around _____
(a) vassalage (b) slavery
(c) serfdom (d) land

II. Fill in the blanks

1. _____ were the original inhabitants of Japan.
2. _____ was the original name of Japan.
3. _____ was the original name of Medina.
4. _____ were the barbarians posing a threat to the Chinese in the north.
5. _____ established Ottoman supremacy in the Balkans.



III. Find out the correct statement

1. (i) Chengiz Khan was an intolerant person in religion
(ii) Mongols destroyed the city of Jerusalem
(iii) Crusades weakened the Ottoman Empire
(iv) Pope Gregory succeeded in making King Henry IV to abdicate the throne by means of Interdict
(a) (i) is correct
(b) (ii) is correct
(c) (ii) and (iii) are correct
(d) (iv) is correct
2. (i) Mangu Khan was the Governor of China.
(ii) Mongol court in China impressed Marco Polo.
(iii) The leader of Red Turbans was Hung Chao.
(iv) Mongols established their rule in China in the name of Yuan dynasty.
a. (i) is correct
b. (ii) is correct
c. (ii) and (iv) are correct
d. (iv) is correct
3. (i) Boyang and Chongan were built during Sung dynasty.
(ii) Peasant uprisings led to the collapse of Tang dynasty.
(iii) Seljuq Turks were a tribe of Tartars.
(iv) Mongols established their rule in China in the name of Yuan dynasty.
(a) (i) is correct
(b) (ii) is correct
(c) (iii) is correct
(d) (iv) is correct

4. Assertion (A): Buddhism went to China from India

Reason (R): The earliest Indian inhabitants in China were the followers of Buddhism.

- a) A is correct; R is wrong
- b) Both A & R are wrong
- c) Both A & R are correct
- d) A is wrong R is irrelevant to A

5. Assertion (A): The fall of Jerusalem into the hands of Seljuk Turks led to the Crusades.

Reason (R): European Christian pilgrims were denied access to Jerusalem.

- a) A is correct; R is not the correct explanation of A
- b) A and R are correct
- c) A and R are wrong
- d) A is correct, R is the correct explanation of A

IV. Match the Following

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 1. Red Turbans | – | Kamakura |
| 2. Seljuk Turks | – | Mohammad II |
| 3. First Shogunate | – | City of Arabian Nights |
| 4. Baghdad | – | Chu Yuan Chang |
| 5. Capture of Constantinople | – | Central Asia |

V. Answer the following briefly

1. The Great Wall of China.
2. Impact of Crusades.
3. How was Feudalism organized in the Middle Ages?
4. Write about the two instruments used by Medieval Pope to assert his authority.

VI. Answer the following in detail

1. Write about crusades and its impact.
2. Who were the Mongols? How did they rule China?

FUN WITH HISTORY

Student Activities

In an outline map of Europe, the students are to sketch the extent of Ottoman Empire at the height of its glory.

Students are to be guided by teachers to look through Google the architectural splendours of Saracenic architecture.

Assignment with teacher's guidance

Sketching Ottoman family tree and attempting a biographical account of Saladin of Egypt and Suleiman the Magnificent of Ottoman Empire.

Attempting an account of the Crusades led by Richard the Lion-Hearted of England and German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.



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