

**M.A. Semester – I
HISTORY**

**Course Code: HIST 103
Course Credit: 06 (Core)**

Aspects of Medieval Society

Units: 1 to 20

By: Dr. Naveen Vashishta



**Centre for Distance and Online Education
Himachal Pradesh University
Summer Hill, Shimla, 171005**

CONTENTS

UNIT NO.	TOPICS	PAGE NO.
1	Transition From Ancient to Medieval World	7
2	Reign of Charlemagne	23
3	Carolingian Renaissance	36
4	Church in Medieval Europe and its Diverse Manifestation	48
5	Rise of Papacy	64
6	Pre-Islamic Tribal Society in Arabia	80
7	Rise of Islam	98
8	Evolution of The Islamic State—I	115
9	Evolution of The Islamic State—II	126
10	Evolution of The Islamic State—III	140
11	Arab Contributions to Civilization	156
12	Feudalism in Medieval Europe—I	172
13	Feudalism in Medieval Europe—II	187
14	The Rise and Fall of The Manorial System	307
15	State, Society and Religion in the Late Medieval China	217
16	Population and Agriculture in Medieval Period	233
17	Medieval Trade and Commerce—I	252
18	Medieval Trade and Commerce—II	263
19	Transition to Modern World—I	277
20	Transition to Modern World—II	296

NEW CBCS SYLLABUS
ASPECTS OF MEDIEVAL SOCIETY
Core Course-HIST 103
First Semester

Course Description

This course seeks to introduce students to the major social, religious and economic currents in medieval societies with a particular emphasis on Europe. Byzantium and the Islamic world between 500 and 1400. Course will explore some of the fundamental characteristics of this fascinating period of history, including the expansion of Christianity and the development of the Papacy and the rise of Islam, evolution of various forms of economic systems and social structures, particularly the emergence of feudal society in Europe. It was the period that witnessed the profound transformation particularly of Europe in economic, social, and political spheres, that transformation will be examined in the context of improvements in agricultural and industrial production, besides the expansion of trade and commerce. A radical cultural change took place in those centuries, whereby a new world of 'Christian Europe' was built up on the remnants of the classical civilization. Many cultural traits of that world have survived into modern times and are repeatedly invoked in modern debates on European identity.

Course Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, students would be able to

- a. Identify the fundamental features of the medieval period and understand the problems of defining the medieval period.
- b. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the medieval world between c. 500 and c. 1400.
- c. Appreciate that there are different approaches to the study of historical periods.
- d. Engage with the substantive issues of change and continuity during this period.
- e. Understand the principal changes happened in medieval agriculture and production technique, trade and commerce.
- f. See how identities were constructed and contested in the medieval period.

Unit-I

1. Transition from ancient to medieval world: End of Roman Empire in west, causes; east-west divide.
2. Reign of Charlemagne and the Carolingian renaissance.
3. Church in Medieval Europe and its diverse manifestation, rise of the papacy.

Unit-II

4. Pre-Islamic tribal society in Arabia.
5. Rise of Islam: Prophet and his teachings: evolution of Islamic state; rule of first four caliphs; Umayyad to Abbasid caliphate.
6. Arab contribution to civilization.

Unit-III

7. Feudalism in medieval Europe: early formulations, ties of dependence, mode of production, forms and structures, mutual obligations of lords and vassals, evolution and types of fiefs.
8. The rise and fall of the manorial system.
9. State, society and religion in the late medieval China.

Unit-IV

10. [a]Population and agriculture in Medieval period: population in Europe, volume and nature of agricultural production [b] Towns and the urbanization of medieval society; pre-industrial town, beginnings of urban society and economy.
11. Medieval trade and commerce: oceanic trade. India's maritime trade. European in the Indian Ocean pattern and routes of trade, centers of commercial activities and commercial practices.
12. Transition to modern world: meaning of modern world, decay of Feudalism, transformation of political structures and trading activities, economic and cultural transformation, new methods of warfare.

Essential Readings

- Anderson, Perry, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* London: Verso Classic Publishers, 1996.
- Arnold, T. W., *The Caliphate*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Baker, Simon, *Ancient Rome: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, London: BBC Books, 2007.
- Bloch, Marc, *Feudal Society*, 2 vols. Delhi: Aakar Books, revised edition, 2017. Available also in Hindi.
- Blochman. W. & Hoppenbrouwers. P., *Introduction to Medieval Europe 300-1500*. London Routledge, 2017.
- Cipolla, M. Carlo (ed.). *The Fontana Economic History of Europe. The Middle Ages. Vol. 1*. London Fontana Publisher, 1972.
- Collins, Roger, *Early Medieval Europe, 300-1000*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1991.
- Deansley, Margaret, *A History of Early Medieval Europe. 476 to 911* London: Methuen Publisher, 1969.
- Duby, Georges. *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Duby, Georges. *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Farooqui, Amar, *Early Social Formations*. Delhi: Manak Publication, 2012. Available also in Hindi.
- Guillaume, A. *The Life of Muhammad*. London: Oxford University Press, 1955.
- Goff, Jacques Le. *Must we Divide History into Periods*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.
- Goff, Jacques Le, *The Birth of Europe*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.
- Hitti, K. Phillip. *History of the Arabs*, London: MacMillan Education Ltd, 1970.
- Lapidus, Ira M.A. *History of Islamic Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (2nd edition), 2002.
- Leon, Homo, *Roman Political Institutions: From City to State*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Levi, R., *Social Structure of Islam*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Lewis, Bernard, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Lewis, Bernard, *The Arabs in History*. London: Oxford University Press, 6th revised ed., 2nd revised ed., 2002.

- Pirenne, Henri, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*. Oxford: Routledge. 2006
- Postan, M. M., *The Medieval Economy and Society*. California: University of California Press. 1972.
- Postan, M. M., *Medieval Trade and Commerce*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. 1970.
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and Modernity*, Chicago: The University of the Chicago Press. 1982.
- Rodinson, Maxime, Muhammad. New York: New Press Publishing House. 2002
- Sinha, Arvind, *Europe in Transition: From Feudalism to Industrialization*. New Delhi; Manohar Publisher 2010.
- Thompson, J., Westfall, Johnson, E. Nathaniel, *An Introduction to Medieval Europe 300-1500*. London: W. W. Norton & Company. 1937.
- Watt, W. Montgomery. *The Majesty that was Islam: The Islamic World 661-1100*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson Publisher. 1974.
- White, Jr., Lynn. *Medieval Technology and Social Change*. London: Oxford University Press. 1973.
- Yang, C. K., *Religion in Chinese Society*. London; University of California Press. 1970,

Suggested Readings

- Anderson, Perry. *Lineage of the absolute State*. London; Verso Classic Publishers. 1980.
- Backman, Clifford, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Balzaret, Ross. 'The Creation of Europe', *History Workshop*, no. 33, Spring 1992, pp. 181-196.
- Barraclough, Geoffrey, *The Medieval Papacy*. London: Thames & Hudson. 1968.
- Bautier, R. H., *The Economic Development of Medieval Europe*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd. 1971.
- Bentley, Jerry H., 'Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History'. *The American Historical Review*, vol. 101, no. 3, June, 1996, pp. 749-770.
- Bishop, John L., *Studies of Governmental Institutions in Chinese History*. Harvard University Press. 1968.
- Bission, T. N., 'The 'Feudal Revolution''. *Past & Present*, no. 142, May 1994, pp. 177-208.
- Burke, Peter, *Popular Culture*, London: Ashgate Publishing. 2009.
- Burns, E. McNall, and Ralph Philip. *World Civilizations*, vol. II. New York. Norton & Co. 1988.
- Chang, Chung-II. *The Chinese Gentry*. Seattle: Washington University Press. 1955.
- Cipolla, Carlo M. *Before the Industrial Revolution. European. Society and Economy, 1000-1709*. London : W. W. Norton. 1994.
- Cohen, Mark R., *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 2008.
- Dudley, Donald. *Roman Society*, London: Penguin, 2000
- Fairbank, John K. (ed.). *The Chinese World Order traditional China's Foreign Relations*, Cambridge, Mass Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Ganshof, F. I., *Feudalism*, London: University of Toronto Press 1964.
- Goff, Jacques Le. *Medieval Civilization. 400-1500*. London; Blackwell Publishing. 1991.

- Ho Ping-Ti. *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*. Columbia University Press. 1962.
- Hodgson, Marshall G. S. *The Venture of Islam*. 3 vols. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1974-77.
- Holmes, George (ed.). *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1988.
- Holt, P. M., A. K. S. Lambton and B. Lewis (eds.), *Cambridge History of Islam*, 2 vols. London: Cambridge University Press. 1971.
- Mote, Frederick. *Imperial China, 900-1800*. New York: Harvard University Press. 1999.
- Mukhia, Harbans. 'Maurice Dobb's Explanation of the Decline of Feudalism in Western Europe: A Critique', *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. 6 no. 12, July 1979-January 1980, pp. 154-184.
- Pirenne, Henri. *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1925.
- Pirenne, Henri. *Mohammed and Charlemagne*. London: Allen and Unwin. 1939.
- Smith, Leslie and Leyser, Conrad. *Motherhood. Women and Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400*. London: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2011.
- Von Grunebaum, G. E. *Classical Islam: A History 600 A.D.-1258 A.D.* London: Routledge. 2017.
- Wickham, Chris. 'The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism'. *Post Present*, no. 103. May 1984. pp. 3-36.
- Wright, A. F. *Buddhism in Chinese History*. London: Stanford University Press. 1959.

UNIT -1

TRANSITION FROM ANCIENT TO MEDIEVAL WORLD

Structure

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Objectives

1.3 End of Roman Empire in West

1.3.1 Factors Behind the Fall of the Roman Empire

1.3.1.1 Barbarian Invasions

1.3.1.2 Economic Instability and Dependence on Slave Labor

1.3.1.3 Emergence of the Eastern Roman Empire

1.3.1.4 Over expansion and Excessive Military Expenditure

1.3.1.5 Political Turmoil and Governance Challenges

1.3.1.6 The Huns' Incursion and Barbarian Migrations

1.3.1.7 Christianity and the Erosion of Traditional Values

1.3.1.8 Decline in the Strength of Roman Legions

1.3.2 Historical Interpretations: Crisis and Decline of the Roman Empire

Self-Check Exercise -1

1.4 The East-West Divide

Self-Check Exercise- 2

1.5 Summary

1.6 Glossary

1.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

1.8 Suggested Readings

1.9 Terminal Questions

1.1 Introduction

To facilitate the study of history, scholars have categorized it into ancient, medieval, and modern eras. However, there are no universally accepted dates or centuries to distinctly separate these periods. The definition of these epochs varies by

region, although certain characteristic features commonly define them. The widely accepted division of ancient, medieval, and modern history is primarily Eurocentric.

The **Medieval Period**, often termed the **Middle Ages**, bridges the gap between ancient and modern times. This era significantly influenced the development of human civilization. The achievements of the Middle Ages laid the groundwork for progress in the modern era. European scholars introduced the term "**Middle Ages**" in the 17th century, viewing it as a prolonged, dark interval between the splendor of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations and the advancements of the modern world.

However, the Middle Ages were not merely a period of stagnation. In the **Islamic world**, this era witnessed remarkable cultural and scientific progress. In **India**, it was a time of synthesis, characterized by the blending of traditional and evolving socioeconomic and political systems. This integration fostered a distinctive cultural framework, promoting coexistence and mutual acceptance, which defined medieval Indian society.

Even within **Europe**, the period was more complex than often depicted. While the early Middle Ages saw a decline in economic prosperity and cultural growth, the later phase experienced significant advancements. Europeans established new educational institutions, embraced innovative ideas, and made notable contributions to art and literature. These developments not only reshaped Europe but also influenced the wider world.

The fall of the **Western Roman Empire** in **476 CE** is typically considered the conclusion of the ancient era and the beginning of the medieval period. In contrast, the **Eastern Roman Empire**, known as the **Byzantine Empire**, endured for nearly a millennium longer. This transition was marked by the collapse of ancient empires, reduced trade and urbanization, the rise of feudalism, the formation of regional kingdoms in the West, and the emergence of new empires in the East.

1.2 Learning Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the transformation from the ancient to the medieval world.
- Identify the key factors that led to the decline of the ancient Roman Empire.
- Compare and contrast the Eastern and Western civilizations.

1.3 The Fall of the Western Roman Empire

The Roman Empire was divided into two regions: the **Western Roman Empire**, with **Rome** as its capital, and the **Eastern Roman Empire**, governed from **Constantinople**.

It was not a sudden collapse but rather a gradual process during which the empire struggled to maintain authority and control over its territories. This decline stemmed from deep-rooted social, economic, and cultural challenges. The popular saying, “Rome was not built in a day, nor was it destroyed in a day,” aptly reflects the prolonged nature of this downfall. Scholars have identified several factors contributing to the crisis and eventual collapse of the once-mighty Roman Empire, as discussed below.

1.3.1.1 Invasions by Barbarian Tribes

One of the most prominent explanations for the fall of the Western Roman Empire revolves around the military defeats inflicted by barbarian groups. While Rome had long dealt with Germanic tribes, the situation worsened from the third century onward as groups like the Goths, Vandals, Franks, and Huns began crossing the empire's borders.

Although the Romans managed to suppress a Germanic revolt in the late fourth century, they faced a significant blow in 410 CE when Alaric, the king of the Gothic tribes, successfully sacked the city of Rome. In the following decades, the empire remained under constant threat until the Vandals raided Rome again in 455 CE. The final blow came in 476 CE when Odoacer, a Germanic soldier serving in the Roman army, revolted and overthrew the last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustus. From that

point onward, no Roman emperor ruled from Italy, leading many historians to mark 476 CE as the official end of the Western Roman Empire.

However, historian Arnold Toynbee argues that foreign invasions were not the root cause but rather a symptom of imperial decline. According to him, a powerful empire rarely faces external threats, but when it shows signs of internal weakness, outsiders grow bold enough to strike. In fact, long before the large-scale invasions, there had been a steady influx of barbarian peoples into Roman society. Many served in the Roman army, held civil service positions, and integrated into various professions. It was only from the third century onward that these interactions escalated into regular invasions, ultimately contributing to the empire's downfall.

1.3.1.2 Economic Crisis and Dependence on Slave Labor

While Rome faced external invasions, it was simultaneously crumbling from within due to a severe financial crisis. Continuous wars and extravagant spending had significantly depleted the imperial treasury. Heavy taxation, inflation, and the debasement of currency further widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Controlling inflation proved challenging, though Emperor Diocletian attempted to curb it through his famous Price Edict of 301 CE. Both Diocletian and Constantine introduced a system of tax collection in kind, which led to a decline in coinage, adversely affecting trade and commerce. These economic shifts proved irreversible, severely impacting the middle class, which played a crucial role in local governance. According to Perry Anderson, urban trade and industry gradually declined across the Roman provinces.

To sustain the growing military, the empire imposed heavier taxes. While this policy succeeded in the eastern provinces, it triggered a crisis in the west. In an attempt to avoid taxation, many wealthy individuals fled to the countryside and established independent fiefdoms. At the same time, labor shortages became prevalent. The Roman economy heavily relied on serfs and slaves for agricultural and artisan work. Traditionally, Rome's military conquests ensured a steady supply of enslaved peoples.

However, as territorial expansion ceased in the second century, the availability of new slaves dwindled.

By Constantine's reign, the Roman state began exerting unprecedented control over its citizens, compelling them to remain in their professions. This led to hereditary occupations, binding individuals to their trades. These policies not only undermined personal freedoms but also restricted provincial autonomy. A further economic blow came in the fifth century when the Vandals seized North Africa and disrupted Mediterranean trade by engaging in piracy. With declining commercial and agricultural production, the empire gradually lost its grip over Europe.

The economic crisis deepened due to an exploitative tax system and the prevalence of absentee landlordism. Diocletian and Constantine's policies of centralization and increased taxation, though effective in the east, intensified the crisis in the west. The burden of taxes fell primarily on peasants, artisans, and small traders. Tax collection at the local level was overseen by decurions or curiales, members of the local elite whose positions eventually became hereditary. These officials often collaborated with the privileged classes, under-assessing their lands to help them evade taxes. In contrast, smaller landowners faced over-assessment, further straining their resources.

Absentee landlords shifted their tax liabilities onto the less privileged, often extracting illegal dues. According to A.H.M. Jones (1964), the Western Roman Empire was governed by a corrupt and inefficient aristocracy. When they could no longer influence the selection of emperors, they became uncooperative and retreated to their rural power bases, further weakening the empire's administrative structure.

1.3.1.3 The Rise of the Eastern Empire

Emperor Diocletian (284–305 CE) divided the Roman Empire into two regions—the Western Empire, with its capital in Milan, and the Eastern Empire, based in Byzantium, later renamed Constantinople. While this division initially made governance more manageable, it ultimately sealed Europe's fate in the late third century. The

separation led to increasing estrangement between the two halves. They struggled to cooperate against external threats and often clashed over resources and military support.

As the divide deepened, the predominantly Greek-speaking Eastern Empire flourished economically, while the Latin-speaking Western Empire fell into financial turmoil. Moreover, the Eastern Empire's strength redirected barbarian invasions toward the West. Emperors like Constantine fortified Constantinople, ensuring its defense, while Italy and Rome—retaining only symbolic significance—were left exposed. This vulnerability contributed to the Western Roman Empire's collapse in the fifth century. In contrast, the Eastern Empire endured for nearly a millennium longer, ultimately falling to the Turks in 1453 CE.



Diocletian

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Diocletianus>

1.3.1.4 Over-expansion and Military Overspending

At its height, the Roman Empire extended from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Euphrates River in West Asia. Many historians argue that the empire's vast size ultimately contributed to its downfall. Governing such an expansive territory presented considerable administrative and logistical hurdles. Despite having an advanced road system, the Romans found it challenging to maintain efficient communication and control over remote provinces. They struggled to deploy adequate troops and resources to defend their borders from both internal revolts and external invasions. By the second century CE, Emperor Hadrian (117–138 CE) was compelled to construct his renowned wall in Britain to secure the empire's frontiers.

The Roman army was instrumental in the empire's expansion. To bolster defense, Emperor Diocletian reorganized the military and introduced conscription. However, as territorial expansion halted by the late second century CE, Rome adopted a defensive strategy to counter Germanic tribes, further enhancing its military strength. The size of the Roman army increased from 250,000 soldiers during Augustus' reign to approximately 650,000 by the fourth century CE. Sustaining such a large force demanded heavy taxation, which alienated many citizens. As resources were increasingly diverted to military expenditures, technological advancements slowed, and the empire's civil infrastructure deteriorated.

1.3.1.5 Crisis of Governance and Political Instability

Ineffective leadership and inconsistent governance further complicated the administration of the vast empire. During the turbulent second and third centuries, the Roman Empire faced severe administrative challenges. Frequent civil wars plunged the empire into disorder, with over 20 rulers ascending the throne within just 75 years, often through the assassination of their predecessors. These internal power struggles fueled political instability, making effective governance nearly impossible. The Praetorian

Guard frequently deposed emperors and installed new ones at will, even once auctioning the throne to the highest bidder.

The Roman Senate, weakened by corruption and incompetence, failed to curb imperial excesses. As the political environment worsened, civic pride eroded, and many Romans lost confidence in their leaders, further undermining the empire's stability.

1.3.1.6 The Arrival of the Huns and the Migration of Barbarian Tribes

The westward migration caused by the Huns' invasion of Europe in the late fourth century partially triggered the barbarian incursions into Roman territory. As these nomadic warriors advanced through northern Europe, they displaced many Germanic tribes, pushing them toward the Roman borders. Reluctantly, the Romans permitted the Visigoths to cross the Danube into imperial territory, but they subjected them to harsh treatment.

According to historian Ammianus Marcellinus, Roman officials exploited the starving Goths, forcing them to trade their children into slavery in exchange for dog meat. This brutal treatment turned the Goths into formidable enemies within the empire's borders. In response to continued oppression, the Goths rebelled, decisively defeating a Roman army and killing the Eastern Emperor Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378 CE.

Although the Romans initially brokered peace with the Goths, the truce collapsed in 410 CE when Alaric, the Gothic king, led his forces westward and sacked Rome. With the Western Empire weakened, other Germanic tribes, such as the Vandals and Saxons, easily breached Roman borders, seizing territories like Britain, Spain, and North Africa.

1.3.1.7 Christianity and the Decline of Traditional Values

Some historians argue that the rise of Christianity contributed to the Roman Empire's decline. The Edict of Milan in 313 CE legalized Christianity, and by 380 CE, it had become the state religion. While these decrees ended centuries of persecution,

they may have also undermined traditional Roman values. Christianity supplanted the polytheistic Roman religion, which had reinforced the divine authority of rulers, and shifted focus from state glory to devotion to a single deity. Additionally, the involvement of popes and other church leaders in political affairs further complicated governance.

The 18th-century historian Edward Gibbon famously asserted that the spread of Christianity weakened the resilience and strength of the Roman people. However, this interpretation has faced considerable criticism. Firstly, it oversimplifies the empire's decline, as no single factor can fully explain such a complex event. Secondly, the Eastern Roman Empire, which was more Christianized than the West, endured for nearly a thousand years after the Western Empire's collapse. Modern scholars generally agree that Christianity played a relatively minor role compared to military, economic, and administrative challenges.

1.3.1.8 Weakening of the Roman Legions

The Roman military, once the backbone of the empire, began to weaken from the mid-third century onward. The composition of the once-mighty legions changed significantly due to poor imperial strategy and declining soldier quality. This deterioration left the empire increasingly vulnerable to barbarian invasions.

As the empire struggled to recruit enough soldiers from among its citizens, emperors like Diocletian and Constantine resorted to hiring foreign mercenaries. Over time, Germanic Goths and other barbarian tribes filled the ranks of the Roman army. While these mercenaries were fierce warriors, they had little loyalty to Rome. Their ambitious leaders often turned against their Roman employers, and many of the barbarians who eventually sacked Rome had previously served in the Roman legions.

The arrival of the Huns from Central Asia further destabilized the empire. Their westward invasion displaced the Visigoths, pushing them toward Roman borders. After clashing with Roman forces in modern-day Turkey, the Visigoths were allowed to settle within the empire. However, the continued reliance on mercenaries led to a situation where Germanic soldiers eventually outnumbered Roman citizens in the imperial army.

This dependence proved catastrophic. Many of the same barbarian groups that once served Rome eventually turned against it. For instance, Visigoth soldiers betrayed the empire and, under their king Alaric, famously sacked Rome in 410 CE.

1.3.2 Historiography: Crisis and Decline of the Roman Empire

Since the 18th century, Western historians have traditionally viewed 476 CE—the year Emperor Romulus Augustus was deposed—as the definitive end of the Roman Empire, marking the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages. However, many modern scholars argue that the empire's decline was a gradual process rather than a singular event.

Some historians attribute the fall to inherent structural weaknesses and the challenges of governing an overextended empire. While earlier scholars identified the deposition of Romulus Augustus as the critical turning point, more recent studies suggest that the empire's decline began as early as 300 CE.

The debate surrounding Rome's decline gained prominence with Edward Gibbon's influential work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). Gibbon attributed the fall to Christianity, claiming it undermined Roman civic virtue and shifted power from the state to the Church. In contrast, Marx and Engels, proponents of historical materialism, argued that the decline resulted from the collapse of the slave-based economy, which had dominated Roman labor systems.

Russian historian Michael Rostovtzeff believed social tensions and pressure from the underprivileged classes contributed to the empire's fall. Similarly, English historian F.W. Walbank blamed the stagnation of technology and the general decline in vitality on Rome's dependence on slavery. Other scholars suggested that the influx of Greeks and Orientals diluted Roman unity, while German historian O. Seeck proposed that the systematic elimination of Rome's most capable leaders left the empire vulnerable, as less competent individuals filled positions of power.

Modern scholars like J.B. Bury, E. Stein, and A. Pagano further enriched the discourse. A. Dopsch argued that the Germanic invasions did not mark a complete break with Roman traditions, as the emerging Germanic kingdoms preserved many Roman institutions. Italian historian S. Mazzarino attributed the fall to economic mismanagement and societal decadence, while A.H.M. Jones highlighted geographical and socio-economic factors. According to Jones, the westward expansion of the empire along the Rhine and Danube led to inevitable conflicts with Germanic tribes, requiring a larger military and increasing tax burdens on common citizens.

Oswald Spengler (1926 CE) viewed the empire's collapse as an intermediate stage between antiquity and the rise of successor states. A.J. Toynbee (1965 CE) suggested that the fall resulted from simultaneous attacks by both the "internal proletariat" (discontented Roman citizens) and the "external proletariat" (barbarian invaders).

Recent archaeological research has introduced new perspectives. Chemical analysis of skeletal remains from the 1st century CE suggests that chronic lead poisoning, caused by contaminated food and wine, weakened the Roman population. Bryan Ward-Perkins (2006 CE) argued that the Western Roman Empire's fall was primarily driven by military crises, including Germanic invasions, the arrival of the Huns, and internal civil wars, rather than a slow internal decline.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 What was the capital of the Western Roman Empire?
- Q.2 Which city became the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire under Emperor Constantine's rule?
- Q.3 Which historian argued that the Western Roman Empire's administration and revenue system were controlled by a corrupt and inefficient aristocracy?

- Q.4 Which Roman emperor split the empire into two parts, establishing Milan as the capital of the Western Roman Empire and Byzantium for the Eastern Roman Empire?
- Q.5 Who authored the book *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776)?
- Q.6 How did the vast expanse of the Roman Empire contribute to its downfall?
- Q.7 When did the nomadic Huns from Central Asia invade West Asia and Eastern Europe?
- Q.8 Which Russian scholar attributed the collapse of the empire to social unrest and the relentless pressure from the underprivileged classes?

1.4 East-West Divide

In history, Asia (excluding Siberia) was considered as the East and Europe was regarded as the West. During the middle Ages, numerous civilizations present in both East and West were alike in some ways, and irreconcilably different in others. When the two societies interacted, the differences in the social class system were one of the key issues that affected many spheres of life. The divide between Eastern social system and feudalism, opposing procedures of trade and agriculture, and fluctuating stability of governments resulted in an ever widening gap between the two ways of life. The Eastern and the Western civilizations are not only different because of their location, but also because of their social class system, their ways of making money, and leadership styles.

The day-to-day life of the common people in the Eastern and the Western Civilizations differed to a great extent on the basis of how their society was run, and what it was focused on. Feudalism and memorialize were the two of the major differences between the societies of the East and the West. These two factors shaped the social hierarchy and the overall life of the common people in the East. The manorial system was established with a lord at the top of the hierarchy who owned a large amount of land. He employed a number of serfs and peasants. They paid a rent of crop

to the lord in exchange for the land they got for cultivation. This feudal society was every man for him and did not aid in the growth of a civilization.

There were significant differences between the social structures of Eastern and Western civilizations. Mongolia emerged from nomadic tribes unified by Genghis Khan, who expanded his empire by conquering neighboring regions. He offered defenders the choice to either join his forces or face death, reflecting the empire's ruthless approach. This aggressive strategy enabled the Mongols to dominate vast parts of Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. In contrast, the Tang Dynasty of China stood out for its emphasis on social mobility. The dynasty introduced a system of examinations that allowed individuals, regardless of wealth, to rise to higher social positions. Unlike the West, where social class was more rigid, Eastern civilizations offered pathways for advancement. For instance, in China, success in civil service exams facilitated upward mobility, while in Mongolia, military skill and merit determined one's rank within the army.

The political structures of the East and West also differed significantly. In the East, dissatisfaction with leadership often led to rebellions and periods of instability. In contrast, the West, despite frequent changes in rulers, experienced relatively less social unrest. Eastern civilizations saw revolts and power vacuums between reigns. For example, the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763 CE) during China's Tang Dynasty was one of the deadliest conflicts in history, exposing the fragility of the government. Meanwhile, the West also faced internal conflicts. In England, the struggle for the throne sparked prolonged conflicts, such as the Wars of the Roses in the 14th and 15th centuries, resulting in significant bloodshed. Similarly, France faced political instability, yet England continued to challenge France in the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453 CE), nearly emerging victorious despite its internal turmoil.

Economically, the East and West differed in how wealth was acquired and distributed. Trade was central to China's economy, with the Silk Road serving as a vital trade network connecting East Asia to Europe. This route facilitated not only the exchange of goods but also the spread of ideas and religions. In contrast, England developed a unique form of feudalism known as bastard feudalism, a term introduced

by historian Charles Plummer in 1885. Unlike traditional feudalism, this system allowed nobles to pay knights for their service with money rather than land, strengthening the social hierarchy. This economic shift empowered the nobility and provided stability during times of weak monarchy. Additionally, the British nobles introduced the Magna Carta to limit the authority of the king. This monetization of the feudal system fundamentally transformed England's governance, making it distinct from the economic practices of Eastern civilizations.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q.1. Name the two major differences between the societies of the East and the West.

Q.2. What was Bastard Feudalism?

1.5 Summary

- The fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE symbolizes the end of the ancient era and the onset of the medieval period.
- This transition was marked by the collapse of ancient empires, a decline in trade and urbanization, the rise of feudal land systems, the formation of regional kingdoms in the West, and the emergence of new empires in the East.
- The Roman Empire was divided into two parts: the Western Roman Empire, with Rome as its capital, and the Eastern Roman Empire, centered in Constantinople.
- The decline of the Roman Empire, especially its western region, remains one of the most analyzed and debated subjects in ancient history.
- Historians attribute the fall to multiple factors, including barbarian invasions, economic difficulties, reliance on slave labor, the rise of the Eastern Empire, over expansion, excessive military spending, political instability, the influence of Christianity, the erosion of traditional values, and the weakening of Roman legions.
- The debate regarding the empire's fall began with Edward Gibbon's influential work, followed by varied interpretations from scholars like Michael Rostovtzeff, F.W. Walbank, O. Seeck, J.B. Bury, E. Stein, A.H.M. Jones, and A.J. Toynbee.

- Historically, Asia (excluding Siberia) was considered the East, while Europe represented the West. During the Middle Ages, civilizations in these regions exhibited both similarities and significant differences.
- The contrasting social structures, divergent approaches to trade and agriculture, and varying degrees of political stability further widened the gap between the East and West, shaping distinct social, economic, and political landscapes.

1.6

Glossary

Conscription: Mandatory enrollment for state service, typically in the military.

Legions: A division of 3,000 to 6,000 men, including a complement of cavalry, in the ancient Roman army.

Magna Carta: A charter of liberties to which the English barons forced King John to give his assent in 1215 at Runnymede.

Proletariat: The lowest class of citizens in ancient Rome.

Silk Road: A network of trade routes connecting China and the Far East with the Middle East and Europe.

1.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Rome

Ans.2 Constantinople

Ans.3 A.H.M Jones

Ans.4 Diocletian

Ans.5 Edward Gibbon

Ans.6 Refer to sub-section 1.1.1.4

Ans.7 1378

Ans.8 Michael Rostovtzeff

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 Feudalism and Manoralism

Ans.2 Refer to section 1.2

1.8 Suggested Readings

1. Goldsworthy, Adrian. *The Fall of the West: The Slow Death of the Roman Superpower*. Phoenix, an imprint of Orion Books Ltd, 2010.
2. Halsall, Guy. *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West: 376–568*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
3. Harper, Kyle. *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*. Princeton University Press, 2017.
4. Heather, Peter. *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History*. Pan Books, 2006.
5. McMullen, Ramsay. *Corruption and the Decline of Rome*. Yale University Press, 1988.
6. Ward-Perkins, Bryan. *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

1.9 Terminal Questions

1. Analyze the political and economic changes that shaped Western Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire.
2. How did economic instability and heavy reliance on slave labor contribute to the Roman Empire's downfall?
3. Discuss the fiscal and monetary difficulties faced by the Roman Empire during the third century CE.
4. Was internal conflict the sole cause of the Western Roman Empire's fall? Explain.
5. Explore the various historiographer interpretations regarding the crisis and decline of the Roman Empire.
6. Write a comprehensive essay on the division between the Eastern and Western Roman Empires.

UNIT- 2

REIGN OF CHARLEMAGNE

Structure

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Objectives

2.3 Reign of Charlemagne

2.3.1 Early Life

2.3.2 Campaigns

2.3.3 Administration

2.3.4 Learning and Role of Church in its Revival

Self-Check Exercise-1

2.4 Death and Succession

Self-Check Exercise-2

2.5 Summary

2.6 Glossary

2.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

2.8 Suggested Readings

2.9 Terminal Questions

2.1 Introduction

Charlemagne stands out as one of the most prominent leaders of the Middle Ages. As the king of the Franks and later the Holy Roman Emperor, he played a crucial role in shaping medieval Europe and overseeing the Carolingian Renaissance. He ascended the throne during a period of significant transformation, and his reign greatly influenced the history of Western Europe and the broader Middle Ages. A distinctive aspect of Charlemagne's rule was his ability to uphold traditional Frankish customs while adapting to new societal challenges. Known for his commanding presence, remarkable energy, personal bravery, and unwavering determination, Charlemagne left an enduring mark on history.

2.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the early life and campaigns of Emperor Charlemagne,
- Understand the system of administration of Charlemagne,
- Examine the contribution of Charlemagne in the development of learning.

2.3 Reign of Charlemagne

In Western Europe, the reign of Charlemagne (768-814 CE) is remembered today for its expansionary and unifying accomplishments throughout the region.

2.3.1 Early Life

Charlemagne, also known as Carolus Magnus (Latin for Charles the Great), after whom the Carolingian dynasty is named, was born in 742 CE. He was the son of King Pippin the Short, who served as the mayor of the palace under the Merovingian king but held actual power over the Frankish kingdom. Charlemagne gained practical leadership experience by engaging in the political, social, and military affairs of his father's court. His formative years were shaped by significant events that greatly influenced the Frankish kingdom's standing in the contemporary world.

Pippin seized the throne from Childeric III, the last Merovingian king, with papal support. In return for papal endorsement of his rule, Pippin pledged to protect Rome, establishing a strong alliance with the Pope.

After Pippin III's death in 768 CE, his empire was divided between his two sons, Carloman II and Charlemagne. However, tensions between the brothers threatened the kingdom's unity. Following Carloman II's death in 771 CE, Charlemagne became the sole ruler of the Frankish territories and reigned until 814 CE. The expanded Frankish state under his leadership became known as the Carolingian Empire. Charlemagne was later canonized by Antipope Paschal III.



Emperor Charlemagne

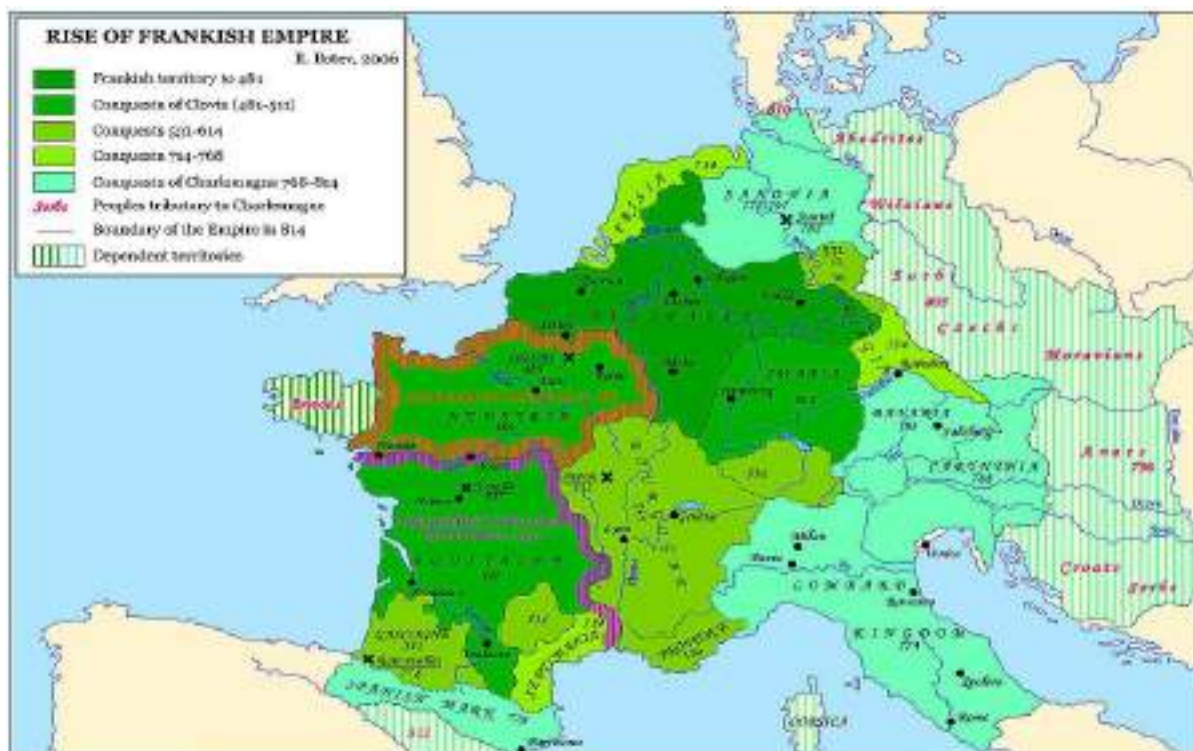
Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Charlemagne-by-Durer.jpg>

2.3.2 Campaigns

The first three decades of his reign were dominated by military campaigns which were prompted by many factors such as the need to protect his realm from external enemies and internal separatists, an urge for conquest and booty and a desire to spread Christianity. He is remembered even today for its expansionary and unifying

accomplishments throughout the Western Europe.

Most of the battles that Charlemagne fought were against the Saxons who gave a lot of trouble to his subjects. After gaining success over them he forced them to embrace Christianity. Those who refused were mercilessly killed. One of Charlemagne's initial campaigns was directed against the Lombard kingdom of northern Italy. The Lombard's had conquered some of the territories ruled by the Pope. These territories are generally called as Papal States which were situated in central Italy and were directly governed by the Pope. The Pope was finding it difficult to resist the attacks of Lombard's and appealed to Charlemagne for military assistance. So Charlemagne continued his father's policy towards the Papal States and became its protector. In 773 CE, he responded to the Pope's request by leading his army into Italy. He defeated the Lombard's and occupied Pavia, the capital of Lombard kingdom.



Frankish Empire

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maps_of_the_Carolingian_Empire#/media/File:Frankish_empire.jpg

By conferring the title of Roman Emperor on Charlemagne, Pope Leo III

cemented the ties between the Church and the Carolingian Empire. The Carolingians got the support of the church, its institutions and officials. Pope's own authority was greatly enhanced. In future it became very important for three emperors to secure the recognition of the Pope to legitimize their authority. This gave the church some say in the affairs of the state, which henceforth led to serious conflicts between the Church and the state.¹

The crowning of the Roman Emperor by the Pope had some implications for the concept of monarchy in medieval Europe. It signified that the emperor's authority had a divine sanction. Thus, monarchical power was based on the divine right to rule and hence it was absolute. The successors of Charlemagne proclaimed the title of '**Holy Roman Emperor**' and the territories over which they ruled were designated as the '**Holy Roman Empire**'. In an age when the emperors were generally not in a position to exercise centralized control over the empire, this terminology and ritual aided the institution of monarchy to maintain its significance within the political structure that was developing in Western Europe. The feudal aristocracy, military leaders, big landowners, warriors derived their authority from the divinely ordained holy Roman Emperor. This was essential for legitimizing the power exercised by the members of the decentralized feudal state.

¹ Amar Farooqui, 2002, "*Early Social Formations*" Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd, Delhi, p.416



St.Peter's Basilica in Rome

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Saint_Peter%27s_Basilica

2.3.3 Administration

Charlemagne was confronted with the problem of governing a vast empire without any centralized apparatus. He had to develop such an apparatus out of the institutions he had received in inheritance. Simultaneously he had to accommodate the interests of the feudal lords who exercised enormous political and economic power at the regional and local levels. Charlemagne organized the administration of his Empire on feudal lines. He considered himself as the owner of all lands. He divided his empire into 52 counties or administrative units and gave his to his trusted friends after taking the oath of loyalty. These tracts or divisions of land were known as counties, duchies and marches which were governed by regional governors known as 'Counts', 'Dukes' and 'Marquises' respectively. They enjoyed enormous autonomy in their areas. They were assigned revenue, judicial and military functions. The royal government at the local level was administered by the Counts who acted in the name of the king in a specific territory to administer justice, maintain army, collect revenues due to the king and maintain law and order. Efforts were made to improve the judicial administration at the local level by attaching individuals learned in the law, called scabini, to each court under the jurisdiction of the Count to assure judgments as per law. Counts were

rewarded for their services by income from lands attached to their offices, charges made for public services performed, fines, and royal gifts. Bishops were assigned important political functions. The central government consisted of the king's personal entourage, called the palatium (palace), composed of trusted lay and ecclesiastical companions of the king who performed various functions. At all the levels of government, utmost attention was given to assuring a regular royal income from produce of royal estates, war booty, tolls, gifts etc.

During the reign of Charlemagne around 300 prominent lords administered the country. The Emperor held the general assembly annually in his capital at Aachen to which all members of the nobility attended. Haroun-al-Rashid, the great Caliph, sent his ambassador with a gift--an elephant—to the court of Charlemagne. The functioning of these feudal lords was monitored and reviewed through special imperial agents called as missi dominici (emissaries of the master). They also communicated the commands of the central government to the counts.

Since the fall of the Roman Empire, this was the first systematic effort to evolve a unified and effective government for a large political entity in Western Europe. The character of Frankish state in the 8th and 9th century can be ascertained by capitularies which were a series of written records of decisions or commands or instructions made by the Carolingian kings. Many of the capitularies are legislative in nature i.e. they interpret laws on different subjects. A few of them are guidelines for better governance while some other shows the disapproval of the actions of certain officials. The capitularies indicates that Charlemagne attempted to create a uniform administrative and legal system for the diverse communities inhabiting his vast empire. However, despite the efforts made by Charlemagne, in the long run the situation was unfavorable for centralization. The state lacked resources required to maintain a large bureaucracy. There was no standing army. The Counts received land grants as remuneration for their services. Payment of salaries to government employees, collection of revenue, recruitment of soldiers and appointment of soldiers was not centralized. Under Charlemagne's successors the process of centralization was reversed since the feudal lords became very powerful.

During the process of re-organization of state, Charlemagne formally associated

the church with the government. The higher officials of the church such as archbishops or bishops were assigned the responsibility of supervising the religious affairs of the areas under their control. In the provinces, the count was the supreme political authority while the Bishops were the supreme religious authority. Bishops continued to play an important role in local government also. Since the church had large landed estates, it could dominate the economy in some regions. During the period following the downfall of the Roman Empire the church was capable of handling the local administrative works.

2.3.4 Learning and Role of Church in its Revival

Historian Perry Anderson has highlighted the contribution made by the church in the development of culture, ideas and some of the institutions of early medieval Europe. The church preserved the achievements of Greco-Roman antiquity and transmitted them to the Carolingian era. Anderson believes that the church was a vital bridge between the two eras.

Charlemagne deliberately involved the church in its program for improving the standards of literacy and education in his empire. During the period of Germanic invasions the church was the main repository of knowledge as it possessed the necessary infrastructure for imparting education.

The revival of learning was probably the most outstanding contribution of the church in the early medieval period. Literacy had declined from the time of Germanic invasions. The people knew Greek and Latin languages; however, Latin was the language of the elite. The people conversed in local languages outside Italy. The growth of the church was a significant factor in endorsing the Latinization of the West in the later Roman Empire. The disintegration of the government and the displacement of the Roman aristocracy in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries had an adverse impact on Latin learning. The Germanic invasions altered the linguistic character of Western Europe. A large section of the ruling class spoke Germanic languages. Greek was the principal language of the Byzantine ruling class.

Charlemagne had no time to read and write. In spite of this handicap, he became a great patron of learning. He attracted a number of great scholars to his court including Alcuin and Northumbria and Theodulf from Spain and caused the revival of learning. He opened a school in his palace for his own children and that of the nobles where the

study of Greek and Latin was encouraged. He attached a school to every church of his empire where monks taught the children reading, writing and arithmetic.

Charlemagne enlarged this infrastructure by taking the initiative to establish state-run educational institutions in France and West Germany. He found it necessary to have institutions for educating a section of the population so as to be able to recruit literate administrative officials for carrying out the routine functions of the government. Records had to be maintained, accounts and letters had to be written and laws had to be promulgated. All this required a minimum level of literacy. As a result of the efforts of Church and the Frankish state there were signs of recovery in the 9th century. The society became relatively literate. However, the common people remained illiterate as Latin was the language of the church, of law, of higher learning and of official documents. It was not the language of the masses. According to March Bloch, the early medieval aristocracy and monarchy was quite backward from the education point of view.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 When Charlemagne became the king of the Frankish Empire?
- Q.2 Who crowned Charlemagne as “Emperor of the Romans” on Christmas Day in 800 CE at Old St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome?
- Q.3 Who has been called as the Father of Europe?
- Q.4 Which was the largest and most powerful political entity in the Western Europe in the beginning of the 9th century?
- Q.5 Into how many counties did Charlemagne divided his empire?
- Q.6 What were the administrative units governed by regional governors known as?
- Q.7 Who were missi dominici?
- Q.8 What were capitularies?

2.4 Death and Succession

By the end of his reign, Charlemagne had successfully unified all the Germanic peoples and Christians under one state and one church. He married four times and had three legitimate sons. During his lifetime, he designated each of his sons as heirs to different regions of the empire. However, by the time of his death in 814 CE, only his

youngest son, Louis I (814–840 CE), remained to inherit the empire. Unfortunately, Louis lacked the ability to govern effectively.

Charlemagne also had many illegitimate children with his concubines. Internal family rivalries, combined with the influence of the powerful Church, led to unrest within the empire. Meanwhile, external threats grew as Arabs, Bretons, Normans, and Vikings frequently attacked the empire's borders. Following continued instability, the empire was officially divided into three parts under the Treaty of Verdun in 843 CE.

Charlemagne's efforts to centralize authority proved short-lived. By the mid-9th century, the centralized structure began to collapse, and the Carolingian Empire fragmented into several semi-autonomous territories governed by dukes and counts. This period also saw the rise of feudal institutions, which took firm root in Western Europe. The Carolingian Empire effectively ceased to exist by 887 CE and was officially dissolved in 987 CE when Hugh Capet, the Count of Paris, founded the Capetian dynasty, which ruled France until 1328 CE.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q.1 Who succeeded Charlemagne as emperor?

Q.2 What title did Charlemagne hold at the time of his death?

Q.3 How did Charlemagne's empire change after his death?

Q. 4 What was Charlemagne's legacy?

2.5 Summary

- Charlemagne became king of a portion of the Frankish Empire following the death of Pippin III in 768 CE and emerged as one of the greatest rulers of the Middle Ages.
- His early reign witnessed significant events that shaped the Frankish kingdom's influence in the contemporary world.

- The expanded Frankish state established by Charlemagne is known as the Carolingian Empire. He strengthened and defended it through over fifty major military campaigns while creating a new administrative structure for effective governance.
- Charlemagne defeated the Saxons, Lombards, Moors, and several Germanic tribes, annexing their territories. He also overthrew the Bavarian king and incorporated Bavaria into his empire.
- His empire included modern-day France, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, western Germany, northern Italy, and a small part of Spain.
- Known as the "Father of Europe," Charlemagne united most of Western Europe for the first time since the Roman Empire and brought regions under Frankish control that had never been part of Roman or Frankish rule.
- Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as Roman Emperor, strengthening the alliance between the Church and the Carolingian Empire.
- To govern his vast empire, Charlemagne divided it into 52 administrative units or counties, each governed by officials known as Counts, Dukes, and Marquises.
- He issued capitulates, written records of laws, decisions, and instructions, many of which had legislative significance.
- During his reorganization of the state, Charlemagne formally integrated the Church into government affairs. The Church's most notable contribution was the revival of learning during the early medieval period.
- Charlemagne promoted education by establishing state-run schools in France and western Germany, increasing literacy within society, though the common people largely remained illiterate.
- After Charlemagne's death in 814 CE, his son Louis I succeeded him but struggled to maintain control. The centralized empire began to fragment by the mid-9th century.

2.6 Glossary

Basilica: The term basilica refers to the function of a building as that of a meeting hall.

Bishop: A person who supervises a number of local churches.

Canonize: Declaration of a deceased person as an officially recognized saint.

Latin: The language of ancient Rome and its empire, widely used historically as a language of scholarship and administration.

2.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

1. 768 CE
2. Pope Leo III
3. Charlemagne
4. Carolingian Empire
5. 52
6. Counts
7. In the Roman Empire, the functioning of feudal lords was monitored and reviewed through special imperial agents called as missi dominici (emissaries of the master).
8. They were a series of written records of decisions or commands or instructions made by the Carolingian kings.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 Charlemagne was succeeded by his son, Louis the Pious.

Ans.2 Charlemagne held the title of Emperor of the Carolingian Empire.

Ans.3 After Charlemagne's death, the Carolingian Empire eventually fragmented due to internal conflicts and external invasions.

Ans.4 Charlemagne's legacy includes the revival of learning and culture known as the Carolingian Renaissance and the foundation of what would become the Holy Roman Empire.

2.8 Suggested Readings

1. Barbero, Alessandro, Charlemagne: Father of a Continent. Translated by Allan Cameron. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
2. Becher, Matthias, Charlemagne, Translated by Bachrach, David S. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
3. Cantor, Norman F, Civilization of the middle Ages: Completely Revised and Expanded Edition, A. HarperCollins, 2005.
4. Collins, Roger, Charlemagne, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.
5. Davies, Norman, Europe: A History, Oxford University Press, 1996.
6. Painter, Sidney, A History of the middle Ages: 284–1500, New York: Knopf, 1953.

2.9 Terminal Questions

1. Discuss the early life and campaigns of Charlemagne.
2. Give an account of the administrative system of Charlemagne.
3. How did the measures of Charlemagne and his successors bring about the growth of components of classical feudalism?
4. Assess the contribution of Charlemagne in the revival of literacy in the early medieval period. How did he involve church in his program of improving standards of literacy and education in his empire?
5. Show the extent of the Empire of Charlemagne on the map of Europe and locate the important towns and cities therein.

UNIT-3

CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE

Structure

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Objectives

3.3 Carolingian Renaissance

3.3.1 Academic Labors

3.3.2 Latin Pronunciation

3.3.3 Carolingian Art

3.3.4 Carolingian Architecture

3.3.5 Carolingian Currency

Self-Check Exercise-1

3.4 Impact of Carolingian Renaissance

Self-Check Exercise-2

3.5 Summary

3.6 Glossary

3.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

3.8 Suggested Readings

3.9 Terminal Questions

3.1 Introduction

A revival of interest in classical learning in the Carolingian Empire (modern day France, Germany, part of Spain and Italy) was known as **Carolingian Renaissance**. Beginning under the patronage of King Charlemagne (768–814 CE), it occurred from the late 8th century and continued to the end of the 9th century. There was an expansion of literature, writing, jurisprudence, liturgical reforms, the arts, architecture and scriptural studies during this period.

3.2 Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of Carolingian Renaissance,
- Examine the factors responsible for Carolingian Renaissance,
- Explain the academic labors done by Carolingian rulers,
- Analyze developments in the field of Latin pronunciation during the period of Carolingian Renaissance,
- Examine the development of art and architecture by the Carolingian rulers,
- Discuss the development of currency during the period of Carolingian Renaissance.

3.3 Carolingian Renaissance

While the Merovingian period saw some advancements in writing and architecture, it was Charlemagne (742–814 CE), King of the Franks and later Holy Roman Emperor, who spearheaded a significant cultural revival known as the Carolingian Renaissance. This movement, the first of the three medieval renaissances, spanned the late 8th to 9th centuries and witnessed remarkable progress in literature, art, architecture, liturgical reforms, jurisprudence, and scriptural studies.

Historian Pierre Riché notes that the Carolingian Renaissance does not imply Western Europe was stagnant before this period. For instance, the 7th-century Isidorean Renaissance flourished in the Visigothic Kingdom of Hispania. The Carolingian revival drew inspiration from Constantine's Christian Roman Empire of the 4th century. Constantine, the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, left a legacy of military prowess and artistic patronage.

Charlemagne saw himself as a new Constantine, initiating reforms through the *Admonitio Generalis* (789 CE) and *Epistola de Litteris Colendis* (794–797 CE). The *Admonitio Generalis* advocated church reform to promote moral integrity, while the *Epistola de Litteris Colendis*, addressed to Abbot Baugulf of Fulda, outlined Charlemagne's vision for cultural renewal. He invited leading scholars from across Europe to his court, seeking their counsel for the advancement of politics, religion, art, and literature.

Carolingian art thrived in manuscripts, sculptures, architecture, and religious artifacts produced between 780 and 900 CE. These creations primarily served the emperor, his court, and associated bishops and abbots. Geographically, the renaissance influenced present-day France, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria.

Several factors fueled this cultural revival. Charlemagne's unification of Western Europe brought peace and stability, fostering prosperity. The need for an educated administrative class to manage government affairs led to the establishment of educational institutions. Following the decline of the Western Roman Empire, Western

Europe experienced economic recovery, marked by the growth of urban settlements from the late 7th century onward.

The Carolingian economy peaked between 775 and 850 CE, driven by efficient labor organization on large estates, resulting in surplus production of grain, salt, and wine. Towns expanded due to inter regional trade, while the slave trade further boosted economic growth. Arab empires valued European slaves, and Charlemagne's Eastern campaigns ensured a steady supply, facilitating long-distance trade across European economies.

3.3.1 Academic Advancements

A major challenge faced by Carolingian rulers was the decline of Latin literacy in 8th-century Western Europe. Few individuals were qualified to serve as court clerks, and many parish priests lacked the ability to read the Vulgate Bible. Moreover, the unrefined Latin of the later Roman Empire had evolved into regional dialects, precursors to modern Romance languages, making scholarly communication across Europe difficult.

To address these issues, Charlemagne issued the Charter of Modern Thought (787 CE), which called for the establishment of schools and the recruitment of prominent scholars. Among the first invited were Italians like Peter of Pisa, Paulinus of Aquileia, and Lombard Paul the Deacon. Later, Irish scholars, including Dicuil and John Scotus Eriugena, attended the courts of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald, respectively.

Standardized curricula were introduced in the newly established schools. Alcuin of York led efforts to create textbooks, compile word lists, and formalize the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy) as the foundation of education.

During this period, the Carolingian minuscule script emerged, characterized by lowercase letters, initially adopted in monasteries such as Corbie and Tours. A

standardized version of Latin was also developed, facilitating the creation of new words while adhering to classical grammatical structures. This Medieval Latin became the universal language of scholarship.

The Carolingian Renaissance produced over 100,000 manuscripts in the 9th century, including the earliest surviving copies of works by Cicero, Horace, Martial, Statius, Lucretius, Terence, Julius Caesar, Boethius, and Martianus Capella.

3.3.2 Latin Pronunciation

Roger Wright attributes the modern pronunciation of Ecclesiastical Latin to the Carolingian Renaissance. Before this period, there was no clear distinction between Latin and Romance languages; Latin was simply viewed as the written form of Romance. However, non-native Latin speakers pronounced words based on their spelling rather than traditional phonetics.

In France, the Carolingian Renaissance introduced this artificial pronunciation even among native speakers. This shift rendered Latin sermons unintelligible to the Romance-speaking public, prompting the Council of Tours to instruct priests to deliver sermons in the older style.

Since texts provided no indication of whether they should be read as Latin or Romance, native Germanic speakers, such as church singers, struggled with Latin orthography. Consequently, efforts began in France to develop distinct spelling systems for vernacular languages, initiating the literary phase of Medieval Romance. However, widespread vernacular writing did not emerge until the 12th-century Renaissance.

3.3.3 Carolingian Art

Carolingian art flourished between 800 and 900 CE, primarily under Charlemagne and his immediate successors. This artistic revival was centered in France, Austria, Germany, and Northern Italy, with monasteries and the imperial court serving as major hubs of production.

Illuminated manuscripts were the most abundant surviving works from this period. Luxury manuscripts, such as Gospel books, were often adorned with treasure bindings—ornate covers made of precious metals and gemstones. During the Carolingian period, the Chronography of 354 was also copied.

Clerics produced these manuscripts in a distinctive style, often featuring inscriptions. Scholars have attributed surviving works to specific workshops, the earliest being the Court School of Charlemagne, also known as the Ada School. This workshop produced notable manuscripts like the Godescalc Evangelistary, Lorsch Gospels, and Ada Gospels, reflecting a revival of Roman classicism.

Archbishop Ebbo of Rheims revolutionized Carolingian art. His Ebbo Gospels featured dynamic and expressive illustrations that departed from classical Mediterranean styles. Another significant center of Carolingian art was the Diocese of Metz, where the Drogo Sacramentary was created for Bishop Drogo.

The artistic traditions established in the early 9th century continued under Charles the Bald, who commissioned elaborately decorated Bibles and founded a Court School. After his death, manuscript production declined but continued sporadically.

Luxury manuscripts often featured treasure bindings with intricate carvings and religious imagery. Notable examples include the upper cover of the Lindau Gospels and the cover of the Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram, produced by the "Palace School" of Charles the Bald.

Charlemagne also revived large-scale bronze casting, establishing a foundry at Aachen. This foundry produced the bronze doors for his palace chapel, modeled after Roman designs. One of the finest examples of Carolingian goldsmith is the Golden Altar (Paliotto) in Milan's Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio, adorned with golden and silver images, filigree, precious stones, and enamel. The Lothair Crystal, a 9th-century engraved rock crystal, remains one of the largest surviving artifacts of its kind.

Carolingian churches and palaces featured elaborate wall paintings, often with religious themes. A notable mosaic in Charlemagne's Palatine Chapel at Aachen depicts Christ enthroned. The palace itself was decorated with murals illustrating the Liberal Arts and Charlemagne's campaigns in Spain. Similarly, Louis the Pious's palace at Ingelheim showcased historical imagery from antiquity to Charlemagne's reign.

The Carolingian period also witnessed the practice of spolia—repurposing ancient monuments and artworks. One prominent example is an equestrian statue. Charlemagne, inspired by the Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius in Rome, brought an equestrian statue from Ravenna to Aachen, believed to depict Theodoric the Great, paralleling Constantine's statue in Rome.

3.3.4 Carolingian Architecture

Carolingian architecture, a pre-Romanesque style, emerged during the Carolingian Renaissance of the late 8th and 9th centuries, when the Carolingian dynasty dominated Western European politics. This architectural style aimed to emulate Roman designs while incorporating elements from Early Christian and Byzantine architecture, ultimately developing a distinct character.

According to John Contreni, as a consequence of Carolingian Renaissance 27 new cathedrals, 417 monastic buildings and 100 royal residences were constructed between 768 and 855 CE. 16 cathedrals, 232 monasteries and 65 palaces were built during the reign of Charlemagne. The kings funded these constructions. The rediscovery of the architecture treatises composed by Vitruvius enabled the building in stone. When the Carolingians visited Italy they discovered the Roman basilicas, the triumphal arches and the palatine chapels. The architects did not just copy the Roman style but rather adapted their plans to meet the requirements of the royal and religious ceremonies. A majority of the architectural elements invented at the beginning of the Carolingian period were refined over a long period of time and successively adapted to ultimately lead to the Romanesque architecture of the 11th century.

The first period of the Carolingian architecture, during the reign of Pepin the

Short and the beginning of Charlemagne's reign, was driven by powerful ecclesiastic figures such as Bishop Chrodegang. The Pope desired to reorganize and standardize the Catholic Church with the help of Charlemagne. Bishop Chrodegang introduced the Roman liturgical services which led to significant changes in the architecture. The orientation of the churches was such that the altar would be located at the eastern end while the entrance would be at the western end. Main references for the Carolingian designers were St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Between the years 780 and 790 CE, the construction of the Lorsch Abbey, the expansion of the Princely Abbey of Corvey, and the foundation of the Abbeys of Saint-Riquier and Fulda acquired prominence. The Palace of Aachen with its chapel was the jewel and the zenith of this period.

Architecture projects multiplied towards the end of Charlemagne's reign. The Plan of Saint Gall, with its detailed instructions, is a significant example of how the architectural elements of a Christian monastery were defined during this period to establish a classic style.

The gatehouse of the monastery at Lorsch, built around 800 CE, exemplifies classical inspiration for Carolingian architecture, built as a triple-arched hall dominating the gateway, with the arched facade interspersed with attached classical columns and pilasters above.

Charlemagne commissioned the architect Odo of Metz to construct a palace and chapel in Aachen, Germany. The chapel was constructed between 792 and 805 CE and is known as the **Palatine Chapel**. It was inspired by the octagonal Justinian church of San Vitale in Ravenna, built in the 6th century, but at Aachen there is a tall monumental western entrance complex, as a whole called a west work—a Carolingian innovation. This space served as the seat of Charlemagne's power and still houses his throne today. An original west work survives today at the Abbey of Corvey, built in 885 CE.

In the 10th century the decline of the Carolingian's started and it culminated in 1000–1020, when the Carolingian institutions collapsed in France while in Germany the

new Ottoman dynasty developed the Ottoman, which borrowed a number of elements from the Carolingian architecture. For example, around 1030 CE, Elise Saint-Pierre-ET-Saint-Paul d' Ottmarsheim in Alsace was founded.

3.3.5 Carolingian Currency

Around 755 CE, Pepin the Short reformed the French currency by standardizing various local systems. He closed minor mints, strengthened royal control over the remaining ones, and improved the purity of coins. A new system was introduced, centered around a .940-fine silver penny, weighing 1/240 of a pound, replacing the gold Roman and Byzantine solidus. Since the debased solidus was roughly equivalent to 11 of these pennies, the shilling was valued accordingly, representing 1/22 of a silver pound, later adjusted to 12 pennies per shilling and 1/20 of a pound. However, during the Carolingian period, neither shillings nor pounds were physically minted, serving only as units of account. Despite the improved quality of the new pennies, traders often rejected them in favor of gold coins commonly used elsewhere, prompting repeated legislation to enforce acceptance of the king's currency.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 Which Frankish ruler is associated with Carolingian Renaissance?
- Q.2 What do you mean by Carolingian Renaissance?
- Q.3 Name the earliest art workshop in the Carolingian era.
- Q.4 What is Spolia?
- Q.5 Who introduced the Roman liturgical services which led to significant changes in the architecture?
- Q.6 Who was commissioned by Charlemagne for constructing a palace and chapel in Aachen, Germany?
- Q.7 Why was the Carolingian Church of Saint Gall so important?
- Q.8 Which architectural plan did most Carolingian churches follow?
- Q.9 Who reformed the French currency around 755 CE?

3.4 Impact of the Carolingian Renaissance

The Carolingian Renaissance primarily influenced a select group of educated individuals within Charlemagne's court, particularly those interested in literature. According to John Contreni, this cultural revival significantly shaped education and culture in Francia, had a somewhat contested impact on artistic pursuits, and played a vital role in the moral renewal of society.

Beyond enhancing Latin writing, preserving classical and patristic texts, and developing a more legible script, the Carolingian Renaissance introduced rational approaches to social issues. This intellectual progress led to the adoption of a common language and writing style, promoting communication across much of Europe. A key achievement of the Carolingian Renaissance was Charlemagne's effort to unify religious practices and cultural identity, envisioning a *Respublica Christiana*—a Christian republic uniting Western Europe under shared religious and cultural frameworks.

Self-Check

Exercise-2

Q.1 Mention one impact of the Carolingian Renaissance.

3.5 Summary

- Charlemagne, King of the Franks and later Holy Roman Emperor, spearheaded the Carolingian Renaissance, the first of the three medieval renaissances.
- This cultural revival, spanning the late 8th to the 9th century, brought advancements in literature, writing, art, architecture, liturgical reforms, law, and scriptural studies.
- It was fueled by the unification of Western Europe, administrative needs, and economic growth.
- To address widespread Latin illiteracy in 8th-century Western Europe, Charlemagne issued a capitulate, establishing schools and inviting leading scholars to his court.
- According to Roger Wright, modern Ecclesiastical Latin pronunciation stems from reforms introduced during this period.

- Carolingian art thrived between 800 and 900 CE under Charlemagne and his successors, primarily produced for the court and major monasteries under imperial patronage, with key artistic centers in France, Austria, Germany, and Northern Italy.
- Carolingian architecture, a re-Romanesque style, emerged during this period, blending Roman, Early Christian, and Byzantine influences while developing unique features.
- Monetary reforms introduced by the Carolingian rulers restored the silver content of the penny, a successor of the Roman denarius.
- These reforms streamlined the number of mints, strengthened royal oversight, and introduced uniform coin designs, often bearing the ruler's name, initials, or title as a mark of authenticity.
- The cultural impact of the Carolingian Renaissance mainly benefited a select group of well-educated individuals within the royal court.
- According to John Contreni, the Renaissance had a profound impact on education and culture in Francia, a debated influence on artistic pursuits, and a significant role in moral regeneration.
- One of the most notable outcomes was Charlemagne's promotion of uniform religious practices and a shared cultural identity across Western Europe.

3.6 Glossary

Ecclesiastical: Related to or associated with the Christian church.

Orthography: The practice of writing words using the correct letters according to standard conventions.

Quadrivium: A medieval university course comprising the 'mathematical arts' of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music.

Trivium: An introductory course at a medieval university which involves the study of grammar, rhetoric and logic.

3.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Charlemagne

Ans.2 A period during the reign of Charlemagne and his successors that was marked by achievements in art, architecture, learning, and music.

Ans.3 The Court School of Charlemagne (or Ada School) was the earliest workshop in the Carolingian era.

Ans.4 Spolia is the Latin word for “spoils” which refer to the taking or appropriation of ancient monumental or other art works for new uses or locations.

Ans.5 Bishop Chrodegang

Ans.6 Architect Odo of Metz

Ans.7 Saint Gall was a combination of church and monastery. It was important because it became a training school for priests to improve literacy.

Ans.8 Basilican

Ans.9 Pepin the Short

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 The Carolingian Renaissance introduced rational approaches to social issues, establishing a unified language and writing style that enhanced communication across much of Europe.

3.8 Suggested Readings

1. **Collins, Roger.** Early Medieval Europe, 300-1000. London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1991.
2. **Contreni, John G.** The Carolingian Renaissance. In *Renaissances before the Renaissance: Cultural Revivals of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 1984.
3. **McKitterick, Rosamond.** Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

4. **Panofsky, Erwin.** Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art. New York/Evanston: Harper Torch Books, 1969.
5. **Scott, Martin.** Medieval Europe. New York: Dorset Press, 1964.
6. **Wright, Robert.** Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France. Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1982.

3.9 Terminal Questions

1. How did Charlemagne promote cultural revival within the Frankish Empire?
2. What were the primary factors driving the Carolingian Renaissance?
3. Discuss the academic advancements achieved during the Carolingian Renaissance.
4. How did the pronunciation of Latin change during the Carolingian period?
5. What forms of artistic expression emerged during the Carolingian Renaissance?
6. Describe the architectural innovations introduced during the Carolingian era.
7. Provide a brief overview of the evolution of Carolingian currency.
8. What was Charlemagne's most significant contribution to the advancement of European art and culture? Support your response with assertion, reasoning, and evidence.

UNIT-4

CHURCH IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE AND ITS DIVERSE MANIFESTATION

Structure

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Objectives

4.3 Church Structure and Beliefs

4.3.1 Structure of the Church

4.3.2 Beliefs of the Church

Self-Check Exercise-1

4.4 Monasticism

Self-Check Exercise-2

4.5 Church in Daily Life

Self-Check Exercise-3

4.6 Corruption and Heresy

Self-Check Exercise-4

4.7 Reformation

Self-Check Exercise-5

4.8 Summary

4.9 Glossary

4.10 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

4.11 Suggested Readings

4.12 Terminal Questions

4.1 Introduction

Religion in Medieval Europe (476-1500 CE) was dominated and informed by the Catholic Church. Most of the people practiced Christianity, and 'Christian' at that time meant 'Catholic as there was initially no other form of that religion.' No other institution wielded so much influence on the people of Medieval Europe as the Christian church. It performed the most wonderful work of preserving the past culture and worked to spread it. At a time when the people were troubled by constant invasions of the barbarians, the Christian church gave shelter and catered to the spiritual needs. The Catholic Church

assumed an important role in the lives of the people for its many services rendered during the times of baptism, confirmation, confession and penance, marriage and the last rites performed before and after the death of a Christian. The church was the manifestation of God's will and presence on earth. The wealth possessed by the church in the form of lands and buildings, services of the educated clergy and its alliance with the state further increased the influence of the church. The authority of the church remained unquestioned for a couple of centuries. To revolt against the church was a very serious matter and even the kings feared to incur the wrath of the church.

4.2 Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the structure of the church and beliefs,
- Describe Monasticism in the Roman Catholic Church,
- Explain the role of the church daily lives of the people,
- Know about the corruption and heresy in church.
- Discuss the reformation movement.

4.3 Church Structure and Beliefs

The Church asserted its authority as divinely ordained through Jesus Christ. According to the New Testament, Jesus appointed Peter (originally named Simon) as his apostle, calling him Cephas (Aramaic for "rock" or "stone")—the foundation upon which the Church would be established. Jesus entrusted Peter with the "keys to the kingdom of heaven." Roman Catholic tradition regards Peter as the first Pope, chosen by God to lead His Church. He was seen as the head of the Church, with his successors inheriting the same divine authority.

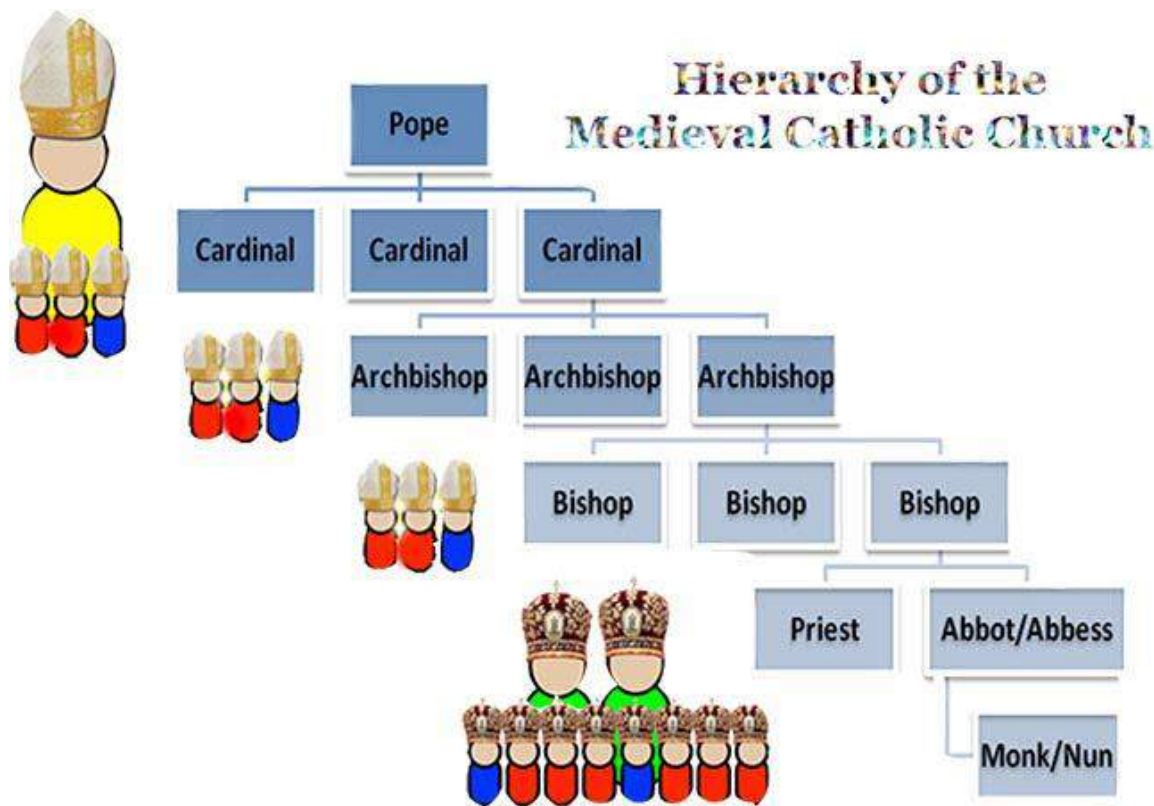
4.3.1 Structure of the Church

During the early medieval period, the Roman Catholic Church developed a hierarchical structure, with positions ranked from highest to lowest as follows:

- Pope
- Cardinals
- Archbishops

- Bishops
- Priests
- Deacons

Each title had a salient function within the Roman Catholic Church. To ensure the smooth functioning of the church, there were checks and balances within the roles. Women were barred from all these titles.



Source: <https://sites.google.com/site/kdiepdesignportfolio/Unit6/independentactivity>

Pope:

The Pope served as the supreme leader of the Christian Church in Western Europe, holding immense power due to the widespread influence of the Church. He was viewed as God's representative on earth and played a significant role in both religious and political matters. The Pope acted as the final authority in spiritual issues and official church doctrines. Church policies and explanations of religious teachings were

communicated through written documents known as Papal Bulls. The Pope also held the authority to punish those who defied the Church, including the power to excommunicate individuals.

Cardinal:

Directly beneath the Pope in the Church hierarchy were the cardinals. Their primary duty was to elect a new Pope upon the death of the current one. In addition, cardinals served as the Pope's principal advisors and played an active role in the administration of the Church.

Bishops/Archbishops:

Bishops and archbishops ranked below the cardinals and served as spiritual leaders within specific regions. A bishop governed a diocese, while an archbishop oversaw an archdiocese, often comprising several dioceses. They were responsible for maintaining church discipline and supervising religious practices within their territories.

Priests:

During the Middle Ages, priests were highly respected members of society, providing spiritual care to the community. They performed key religious ceremonies such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Priests were also the primary source of education, ensuring the observance of religious traditions and offering final rites to the dying.

Deacon:

Alongside priests and bishops, deacons were integral members of the clergy. Their role encompassed three main areas: liturgy, preaching, and service. Deacons assisted bishops and priests during religious ceremonies, proclaimed the Gospel, and sometimes delivered homilies. They could also conduct baptisms, witness marriages, lead funeral services, and oversee the Liturgy of the Hours, among other responsibilities.

4.3.2 Beliefs of the Church

The Church believed that Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of the one true God, as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. These scriptures were seen as prophetic,

foretelling the arrival of Christ. The history of humanity and the age of the earth were considered to be outlined within the Christian Bible, which was regarded as the word of God and the world's oldest sacred text.

Since the average person could not interpret the Bible independently, the clergy played a crucial role in spiritual guidance. Understanding the scriptures or communicating with God required the assistance of priests, who were ordained under the authority of the Pope.

The Church's hierarchical structure reinforced the social hierarchy of the time. People were believed to be born into specific social classes by divine will. Attempting to improve one's social standing was seen as challenging God's plan, making social mobility rare. As a result, most individuals accepted their circumstances and sought to live within the boundaries defined by their birth.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Q.1 Who is regarded as the first Pope in the Roman Catholic tradition?

Q.2 What were Papal Bulls?

Q.3 What was the primary responsibility of Cardinal?

Q.4 What do you understand by Deacon?

4.4 Monasticism

The way of life in monasteries and convents is called **monasticism**. Initially, the most important work of the Roman Catholic Church was to spread the teachings of Jesus Christ. The barbarians had to become civilized and Christian. The Christian monks played a very significant role in this mission. The monks resided in monasteries. They lived together away from the war and turmoil that was ravaging Europe at that time. They tried to fashion their lives on the lines established by St. Benedict. St. Benedict's believed that monks should take three vows, namely, to lead a life of chastity,

poverty, and obedience. The Benedictine Rule also commanded the monks to elect one among them as an Abbot and love manual labour. The monks constructed a number of churches in Europe. St. Benedict had founded a beautiful monastery in Monte Casino (in southern Italy). He also encouraged monks to engage in social and intellectual work such as tending to the sick and the poor and teaching children at schools. Thus, in keeping with the Benedictine tradition, monks established schools and hospitals. They made copies of the Holy Bible and Greek and Latin classics. Some monks started writing. St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo (North Africa), wrote one of the most original works of the time titled The City of God. Following the monastic movement began by St. Benedict, there was the Cluniac movement with its headquarters at Cluny in Burgundy. Its leading monk, Hildebrand, became the Pope-Pope Gregory VII. There were other orders of monks known as the Carthusian and Cistercian. They were known to have led a life of poverty and asceticism. The most famous of the Cistercian order was St. Bernard, Abbot of Clair Vaux in France, who "encouraged mysticism and contemplation." During the 13th century two new kinds of wandering friars (monks)- Franciscans and Dominicans-travelled across Europe. The founders of these two orders were St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) and St. Dominic (1170-1221) respectively and both insisted their followers not to possess any property. Their chief mission was social work. They wandered, preached people in their native tongue, and uplifted the poor.



Ruins of the medieval Catholic Church of Arac

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ruins_of_the_medieval_Catholic_chur

Monasteries served as centers of intellectual activity in medieval society. Monks, often the most educated individuals of their time, preserved the literary heritage of ancient civilizations and the early church through monastery libraries. Many monasteries also operated schools, further promoting education.

Over time, monasteries accumulated significant wealth. Nobles often donated land or money to monasteries as acts of piety, hoping to secure salvation for themselves or their families. While convents also received such donations, they were fewer in number and less affluent compared to monasteries. Monks and nuns frequently provided care for the needy.

During the Crusades, several military orders, including the Knights Templar, the Knights Hospitaller, and the Teutonic Knights, aligned themselves with the church's mission to reclaim holy sites from Muslim control. Additionally, some monks engaged in missionary work under the direction of the Popes.

St. Augustine undertook the mission work of converting the Anglo-Saxons in England. Earlier, St. Patrick had gone to Ireland to convert the Irish people to Christianity in 444 CE. Pope Gregory II sent St. Boniface to Germany to carry on his missionary work. He founded the Carolingian Church and became a martyr at Frisia in 754 CE.

Some monks left their monasteries to become missionaries, a practice that existed long before the time of Benedict. Saint Patrick of Ireland and Saint Augustine of England were among those who did important missionary work.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q.1 What is monasticism?

Q.2 Mention the three vows that the monks should take according to St. Benedict.

Q.3 Name the author of The City of God.

4.5 Church in Daily Life

During the Middle Ages, daily life revolved around the church. People attended prayers daily and participated in weekly services, confession, and acts of repentance. The

church, exempt from taxes, was financially supported by the community through a tax known as the **tithe**, which was paid for religious ceremonies like baptisms, confirmations, funerals, and celebrations of saints' days and holy festivals such as Easter. In countries like England and Scandinavia, an additional church tax called **Peter's Pence** was collected. The church also generated significant income from its vast landholdings, making it immensely wealthy by the early 13th century.

The church's teachings were considered absolute and unquestionable. One was either part of the church or excluded from it, with the latter resulting in social isolation. For instance, Jews were often segregated, living in separate quarters surrounded by Christian communities and facing discrimination.

The **baptismal font** was central to both worship and justice in small-town churches and city cathedrals. This large stone basin, used for infant or adult baptisms, also played a role in determining guilt during trials by ordeal. In one such ordeal, an accused person was bound and dropped into the font—floating indicated guilt, while sinking signified innocence.

Other forms of ordeal included the **ordeal of iron**, where the accused had to hold a red-hot poker. If their hands remained unburden, they were declared innocent, though historical records suggest few, if any, were ever found innocent. Similarly, the **water ordeal** was performed in rivers, streams, or lakes. For example, women accused of witchcraft were tied in a sack with their cat and thrown into water. If they escaped and surfaced, they were deemed guilty and executed; if they drowned, they were considered innocent.

Public ordeals, like executions, served as community entertainment, alongside festivals, weddings, and other social events, all funded by the people's tithes. While the lower classes bore most of the financial burden, the nobility was also expected to make significant donations to secure their place in heaven.

The belief in **purgatory** became a major source of church revenue. Clergy sold **indulgences**, promising reduced time in purgatory for a price. Another source of

income was the trade in **relics**, often counterfeit, such as splinters from Christ's cross, vials of water from the Holy Land, or the fingers and toes of saints. These items were sold with claims of bringing good fortune or protection from misfortune.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q.1 What is Peter's Penance?

Q.2 What do you understand by baptismal font?

4.6 Corruption and Heresy

During the Middle Ages, the rise of heretical sects was largely a reaction to the corruption and greed within the church. The vast wealth amassed by the church through tithes and donations fueled an ever-growing desire for power. Archbishops could excommunicate nobles, towns, or even monasteries—essentially cutting them off from the church, God's grace, and social interaction—without valid justification. Even devout religious figures faced disciplinary action if they opposed church authorities.

Priests were often corrupt and, in many cases, illiterate, holding their positions primarily through family influence and favoritism. Historian G. G. Coulton references a letter from 1281 CE warning about priests' widespread ignorance. Reformers like **Margery Kempe**, nearly 200 years after **Hildegard of Bingen**, along with **John Wycliffe** and **Jan Hus**, challenged clerical corruption. However, the church resisted reform, as questioning its core principles was strictly forbidden.

Disillusioned by these abuses, many sought genuine spiritual experiences outside the church by joining independent religious sects. Among these, the **Cathars** of southern France were the most prominent. They peacefully coexisted with neighboring Catholic communities, practicing their own rituals and beliefs.

The church, however, viewed such communities as threats. It frequently condemned and destroyed them, massacred their members, and confiscated their properties. Even orthodox groups like the **Beguines**, who adhered to Catholic teachings but formed spontaneously to address societal needs without church approval, faced condemnation and were disbanded in the 12th century.

These sects sought spiritual autonomy based on the Bible rather than church rituals. The **Cathars**, for example, rejected the belief in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, asserting that Jesus was spiritually offered for humanity's sins. They also embraced the feminine divine principle, worshiping **Sophia**, the goddess of wisdom, and dedicating their lives to her.

Any deviation from traditional religious practices was seen as a challenge to the church's authority. Despite substantial support and protection for some sects, the church wielded enough power to suppress such movements and maintain its dominance.

The church ordered the Dominicans to search for heretics in the mid-1200s. During this search, known as the inquisition, any person suspected of heresy could be tried in secret and tortured in order to force a confession. Heretics who admitted that they had done wrong had to perform penance. The Inquisition criticized the heretics who did not confess and were referred to the civil government to be punished, sometimes by burning at the stake. The church believed that these severe penalties were essential for preventing the spread of heresy throughout Christendom.

Self-Check Exercise-4

Q.1 Who were Cathars?

Q.2 Define Inquisition.

4.7 Reformation

During the Middle Ages, it was inconceivable to question the authority of the Church, as heaven, hell, and purgatory were believed to be real places, and criticizing the Church was seen as defying God. However, the 16th century witnessed the emergence of the **Reformation**, a religious movement aimed at reforming the Roman Catholic Church, ultimately leading to the establishment of **Protestant churches**.

The Protestant Reformation was not initially intended to overthrow the Church's power but rather to address its corruption and abuses. A key figure in this movement was

Martin Luther (1483–1546 CE), a German priest and monk. Luther's concern turned into outrage over the Church's practices, particularly the sale of **indulgences**, which he viewed as a money-making scheme lacking biblical support and spiritual value. In **1517 CE**, he expressed his opposition through his famous **95 Theses**, challenging not only indulgences but also various other church teachings.

In **1520 CE**, **Pope Leo X** condemned Luther, demanding that he recant his criticisms. When Luther refused, he was **excommunicated in 1521 CE**, becoming an outlaw. Like earlier reformers, Luther simply voiced the need to end widespread corruption. He further defied the Church by translating the **Bible into the vernacular**, making it accessible to common people. He also rejected **sacerdotalism**—the belief that priests were necessary intermediaries between God and humanity—arguing that the **Bible and prayer** were sufficient for direct communication with God.

By promoting these ideas, Luther not only challenged the Pope's authority but also rendered the hierarchical structure of the Church— including cardinals, bishops, archbishops, and priests—obsolete and outdated.



Martin Luther

Source:[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Martin_Luther#/media/File:Lucas_Cranach_I_-_Martin_Luther_\(1529\),_St._Anna_in_Augsburg.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Martin_Luther#/media/File:Lucas_Cranach_I_-_Martin_Luther_(1529),_St._Anna_in_Augsburg.jpg)

Martin Luther believed that **salvation came through God's grace**, not through human deeds. He argued that the Church's demands for good works were spiritually meaningless and only served to enrich its coffers and fund grand cathedrals. The **political climate in Germany**, combined with Luther's **charisma and intellect**, transformed his reform efforts into a powerful movement that ultimately **challenged the Church's authority**.

Other reformers, such as **Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531 CE)** and **John Calvin (1509–1564 CE)**, further advanced the Reformation in their respective regions, inspiring many others to follow their lead.

Self-Check Exercise-5

Q.1 What is Reformation?

Q.2 Who was Martin Luther?

4.8 Summary

- The Christian Church held unparalleled influence over the lives of people in Medieval Europe.
- The Catholic Church played a vital role by offering services during baptism, confirmation, confession, penance, marriage, and last rites performed before and after death.
- The Church claimed its divine authority through Jesus Christ and maintained a strict hierarchy during the early medieval period.
- This hierarchy was structured from highest to lowest as follows: Pope, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.
- The Church believed Jesus Christ to be the only begotten son of the one true God, as foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures.
- Since common people couldn't interpret the Bible, the clergy became essential for spiritual guidance, reinforcing the social hierarchy.
- The monastic lifestyle, known as monasticism, was prevalent in monasteries and convents, where spreading the teachings of Jesus Christ was the primary goal.
- Christian monks played a crucial role in this mission, constructing numerous churches across Europe and addressing the intellectual needs of medieval society.
- During the Middle Ages, daily life revolved around the church, with people attending prayers, weekly services, confession, and repentance.
- The Church imposed taxes on citizens, such as the tithe and Peter's Pence, while its teachings were considered absolute truths that could not be questioned.
- The rise of heretical sects reflected opposition to the Church's corruption and greed, fueled by the vast wealth it accumulated through tithes and gifts, which translated into power.
- Many priests were viewed as corrupt, illiterate, and appointed through family influence and favoritism.

- To suppress heresy, the Church initiated the Inquisition in the mid-1200s, empowering Dominican friars to search for heretics. Suspects were tried secretly, often subjected to torture to extract confessions.
- In the 16th century, the Reformation emerged as a religious movement aimed at reforming the Roman Catholic Church, ultimately leading to the establishment of Protestant churches. This movement was initiated by Martin Luther of Germany.

4.9 Glossary

Beguines: Laywomen who lived like **nuns**, held **shared possessions**, and dedicated themselves to **poverty** and **community service**.

Convent: A convent is either a community of priests or the building used by the community, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church.

Excommunication: In Roman Catholic canon law, excommunication is a censure and thus a "medicinal penalty" intended to invite the person to change attitude that incurred the penalty, repent, and return to full communion.

Indulgences: The redemption letters by which an individual could reduce the length and severity of punishment that heaven would require as payment for their sins, or so the church claimed.

Purgatory: An afterlife kingdom between the heaven and hell where souls remained trapped until they had paid for their sins.

Sacerdotalism: It is the belief in some Christian churches that priests the mediators between God and man.

Tithe: In the middle Ages, the Catholic Church in Europe collected a tax of its own, separate from the kings' taxes, which were called a tithe.

4.10 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Peter

Ans.2 The official policies of the church and explanations of religious teachings were done by the medieval Pope in the form of written letters known as Papal Bulls.

Ans.3 The primary responsibility of a cardinal was to elect a new Pope in the event of his death.

Ans.4 A deacon is a member of the diaconate, an office in Christian churches that is generally associated with service of some kind, but which varies among theological and denominational traditions.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 The lifestyle followed in monasteries and convents is known as monasticism.

Ans.2 It involves living a life of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

Ans.3 St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, was a significant figure in early Christianity.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1 Peter's Pence refers to donations or payments made directly to the Holy See of the Catholic Church.

Ans.2 A baptismal font is a piece of church furniture used for baptism and sometimes for determining guilt or innocence in cases of criminal accusations.

Self-Check Exercise-4

Ans.1 The Cathars were a heretical Christian sect that thrived in Western Europe during the 12th and 13th centuries.

Ans.2: The Inquisition was a judicial process and later an institution established by the papacy and sometimes by secular authorities to combat heresy.

Self-Check Exercise-5

Ans.1 The Reformation was a 16th-century religious movement aimed at reforming the Roman Catholic Church, leading to the rise of Protestantism.

Ans.2 Martin Luther was a German monk who revolutionized Christianity by nailing his '95 Theses' to a church door in 1517 CE, sparking the Protestant Reformation Movement.

4.11 Suggested Readings

1. Brooke, R. & C. Popular Religion in the Middle Ages. Barnes & Noble Books, 1996.
2. Cantor, N. F. The Civilization of the Middle Ages. Harper Perennial, 1994.
3. Coulton, G. G. Medieval Village, Manor, and Monastery. Harper & Row, 1960.
4. Densely, M. A History of the Medieval Church 590–1500. Methuen & Co, 2019.
5. Hastings, Adrian. A World History of Christianity. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.
6. Loyn, H. R. The Middle Ages: A Concise Encyclopedia. Thames & Hudson, 1991.
7. Margery Kempe (translated by Barry Windeatt). The Book of Margery Kempe. Penguin Classics, 2000.
8. Volz, Carl A. The Medieval Church: From the Dawn of the Middle Ages to the Eve of the Reformation. Abingdon Press, 2011.

4.12 Terminal Questions

1. Describe the structure and core beliefs of the medieval European Church.
2. Explain the concept of monasticism in medieval Europe.
3. What was the church's role in the daily lives of people during the Middle Ages?
4. What do you know about corruption and heresy within the medieval European Church?
5. Write a brief note on the Reformation Movement.

UNIT- 5

RISE OF PAPACY

Structure

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Objectives

5.3 Rise of Papacy

5.3.1 Ostrogothic Papacy

5.3.2 Byzantine Papacy

5.3.3 Frankish Papacy

5.3.4 Influence of Powerful Roman Families

5.3.5 Conflicts with the Emperor and East

5.3.6 The Wandering Popes

5.3.7 Avignon Papacy

Self-Check Exercise-1

5.4 Western Schism

Self-Check Exercise-2

5.5 Summary

5.6 Glossary

5.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

5.8 Suggested Readings

5.9 Terminal Questions

5.1 Introduction

The term Papacy refers to the office and authority of the Pope of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church expanded across Europe, establishing numerous churches. Bishops, supported by priests, catered to the spiritual needs of the community. Over time, the Bishop of Rome asserted himself as the leader of Christendom, a position first held by St. Peter, who was believed to have been “entrusted with the keys of heaven.”

After the fall of Rome, the Church emerged as a super-government in Western Europe, a role solidified under Pope Gregory the Great (540–604 CE), who laid the foundation for the medieval Papacy. The Middle Ages witnessed the Papacy's increasing power,

alongside the rise of the Holy Roman Empire, reaching its peak between 1073 and 1294 CE.

The Papacy's influence was shaped by temporal rulers from the Italian Peninsula, leading to distinct phases known as the Ostrogothic Papacy, Byzantine Papacy, and Frankish Papacy. Over time, the Papacy consolidated territorial control over the Papal States. Eventually, the role of external rulers was replaced by powerful Roman families during the Speculum Obscurum, the Crescent Era, and the Tusculum Period.

Between 1048 and 1257 CE, the Papacy faced escalating conflicts with the leaders and churches of the Holy Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire (Eastern Roman Empire). This conflict ultimately led to the East–West Schism, dividing Christianity into the Western Church and the Eastern Church.

From 1257 to 1377 CE, although the Pope remained the Bishop of Rome, he resided in various cities, including Viterbo, Orvieto, Perugia, and eventually Avignon. Following the Avignon Papacy, the Pope's return to Rome was marked by the Western Schism, a period when the Western Church was divided among two, and at times, three competing Papal claimants.

5.2 Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the rise of Ostrogothic Papacy,
- Understand the rise and growth of Byzantine Papacy,
- Know about the influence of the kings of Franks on Papacy,
- Determine the influence of powerful and corrupt aristocratic families on Papacy,
- Examine the conflicts of Papacy with the emperors and the east,
- Know about the wandering Popes,
- Comprehend the Avignon Papacy,
- Understand Western Schism.

5.3 Rise of Papacy

5.3.1 Ostrogothic Papacy (493–537 CE)

The Ostrogothic Papacy lasted from 493 to 537 CE, during which the Ostrogothic Kingdom exerted significant influence over the Papacy. Pope Simplicius (468–483 CE) witnessed the fall of the Western Roman Empire, and his successor's election in 483 CE was the first Papal election held without an existing Western Roman Emperor. Although the Ostrogothic kings did not directly appoint Popes, they held considerable influence over the Papacy. Theodoric the Great, along with his successors Athalaric and Theodahad, played a crucial role in the selection and administration of Popes.

The Ostrogothic influence became evident during the first schism in 498 CE, when two rival Popes were elected—Pope Symmachus (498–514 CE) and Antipope Laurentius. Symmachus's victory marked the first recorded case of simony in Papal history. He also introduced the practice of Popes naming their successors, a system that lasted until an unpopular appointment in 530 CE, leading to further conflict until the election of John II in 532 CE, the first Pope to adopt a new name upon succession.

Despite his dominance, Theodoric remained lenient toward the Catholic Church and refrained from interfering in dogmatic matters, though he maintained significant control over Papal affairs. The Ostrogothic influence ended when Justinian I reclaimed Rome during the Gothic War. His general, Belisarius, deposed the pro-Gothic Pope Silverius (536–537 CE) and installed Pope Vigilius (537–555 CE) as his preferred candidate.

5.3.2 Byzantine Papacy (537–752 CE)

The Byzantine Papacy spanned from 537 to 752 CE, during which Byzantine Emperors held significant control over the Roman Papacy. During this period, episcopal consecration required imperial approval, and many Popes were appointed from the *apocrisarii* (Papal liaisons to the emperor) or Byzantine territories like Greece, Syria, and Sicily. After the Gothic War (535–554 CE), Emperor Justinian I restored Roman rule in Italy and appointed the next three Popes, a practice continued by his successors.

With the exception of Pope Martin I, no other Pope challenged the emperor's authority to confirm the election of the Bishop of Rome. However, theological conflicts

arose between the Pope and the Byzantine Emperor, particularly regarding Monotheism and Iconoclasm. During this period, Greek-speaking Popes from Greece, Syria, and Byzantine Sicily replaced the traditional Roman nobility in the Papal office. Under their leadership, Rome became a melting pot of Western and Eastern Christian traditions, reflected in both art and liturgy.

A key figure of this era was Pope Gregory I (540–604 CE), who championed Papal primacy and expanded missionary activities across Northern Europe, including England. He assumed office during the Lombard invasions, when Rome faced a severe law and order crisis. Leveraging his position, Gregory I restored order, showcased administrative and diplomatic skills, and consolidated Papal authority over temporal matters. He also dispatched missionaries to Britain and Germany, significantly advancing the spread of Christianity.



Pope Gregory I

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pope_Gregory_I_illustration.jpg

The Duchy of Rome was a Byzantine district within the Exarchate of Ravenna, governed by an imperial official known as the dux. The exarchate was primarily divided into two regions: the territory around Ravenna, serving as the center of Byzantine resistance against the Lombards, and the Duchy of Rome, which included Latium north of the Tiber and Campania to the Garigliano River in the south. The Pope played a key role in leading the opposition within this region.

Efforts were made to maintain control over the connecting territories and preserve communication routes across the Apennine Mountains. In 728 CE, Lombard King Liutprand captured the Castle of Sutri, located along the road to Perugia, but later returned it to Pope Gregory II as a "gift to the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul." Despite growing tensions, the Popes continued to recognize the authority of the Byzantine government.

In 738 CE, Lombard Duke Transamund of Spoleto seized the Castle of Gallese, a strategic fortress guarding the road to Perugia. However, Pope Gregory III successfully negotiated its return by offering a substantial payment.

5.3.3 Frankish Papacy

In 751 CE, Aistulf, the Lombard king, captured Ravenna and threatened Rome. In response, Pope Stephen II sought assistance from Frankish King Pepin III to counter the Lombard invasion. During this period, Papal elections were often contentious, influenced by secular and ecclesiastical factions, reflecting the power struggles within Italy.

To solidify their alliance, Pope Stephen II consecrated Pepin at the Abbey of St. Denis, near Paris, alongside Pepin's sons, Charles (Charlemagne) and Carloman. In 754 CE and again in 756 CE, Pepin invaded northern Italy, successfully driving out the Lombards from Ravenna's territory. However, rather than returning the region to the

Byzantine emperor, Pepin gifted large parts of central Italy to the Pope and his successors.

The 756 CE land grant elevated the Papacy to temporal power, making the Popes both spiritual and secular rulers. This marked the foundation of the Papal States, which remained under Papal control until their integration into the Kingdom of Italy in 1870. For the next eleven centuries, the history of Rome became closely intertwined with the Papacy's history.

In 799 CE, after being assaulted by enemies in Rome, Pope Leo III traveled across the Alps to seek Charlemagne's support at Paderborn. While the details of their conversation remain unknown, Charlemagne visited Rome in 800 CE to back the Pope. On Christmas Day, during a ceremony at St. Peter's Basilica, Leo III unexpectedly crowned Charlemagne as emperor, despite Charlemagne's initial displeasure, though he eventually accepted the title.

Following Charlemagne's reign, his successor Louis the Pious further intervened in Papal elections, supporting Pope Eugene II's claim. From this period onward, Popes were required to swear loyalty to the Frankish Emperor, while the Pope's consecration could only proceed in the presence of imperial representatives.

The consecration of Pope Gregory IV (827–844 CE), chosen by Roman nobles, faced a six-month delay until Louis the Pious gave his approval. Similarly, Pope Sergius II (844–847 CE), backed by the Roman nobility, was consecrated without imperial consent, prompting Emperor Lothair to dispatch his son Louis with an army. Peace was restored only after Sergius II successfully appeased Louis, crowned him king, and secured Lothair's support.

5.3.4 Influence of Powerful Roman Families

During the late 9th century to the mid-10th century, a new power structure emerged with the rise of Theophylact, Count of Tusculum, and his family. This period (904 to 963 CE) became known as the "Speculum Obscurum" (Latin for "Dark Age"). In the 16th century, the Italian historian Caesar Baronius, in his work *Annales Ecclesiastici*,

described this era as a time of Papal corruption and immorality, marking one of the lowest points in Papal history. It was characterized by corruption, violence, and moral decay, leading to a significant decline in the Papacy's authority.

This era also witnessed the rise of influential Roman women from the Tusculum family, including Theodora, wife of Theophylact, and her daughters, Marozia and Theodora the Younger. They exerted considerable influence over the Papacy and church affairs through political conspiracies, marriages, and romantic alliances.

In the 19th century, Protestant German theologians coined terms like "pornocracy" (from the Greek *pornokratiā*, meaning "rule of prostitutes"), "hetaerocracy" ("government by mistresses"), and "Rule of the Harlots" (*Hurenregiment* in German) to describe this period. Historian Will Durant referred to the time from 867 to 1049 CE as the "Nadir of the Papacy", signifying its lowest point in power and morality.

5.3.5 Conflicts with the Emperor and the East

The Imperial Crown, once held by the Carolingian emperors, became a subject of dispute among their divided heirs and local rulers, with no clear victor until Otto I, Holy Roman Emperor, conquered Italy. In 962 CE, Italy was incorporated as a kingdom within the Holy Roman Empire. As the emperors consolidated power, the northern Italian city-states were divided between the Guelphs (supporters of the Pope) and the Ghibellines (supporters of the Emperor).

In 1048 CE, Henry III, the Holy Roman Emperor, visited Rome and found the Papal seat contested by three rival Popes, a situation stemming from the controversial actions of Pope Benedict IX. Henry III deposed all three claimants and installed his preferred candidate, Pope Clement II.

From 1048 to 1257 CE, the Papacy was embroiled in a power struggle with the Holy Roman Emperor, most notably the Investiture Controversy, centered around the right to appoint bishops and church officials. Pope Gregory VII issued a decree

prohibiting lay investiture, asserting his supremacy in both spiritual and temporal matters.

This provoked Emperor Henry IV, who denounced Gregory and declared him deposed. In retaliation, Pope Gregory VII excommunicated Henry IV and declared him deposed. The conflict reached its peak in the famous incident at Canossa in 1077 CE, where Henry IV, seeking forgiveness, stood barefoot in the snow for three days outside the Pope's castle.

After receiving the Papal pardon, Henry IV regained his imperial power but soon retaliated, forcing Pope Gregory VII to flee Rome, further intensifying the struggle between the Papacy and the Empire.



Investiture Conflict

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Investiture_controversy#/media/File:Omer_et_le_Roi_Dagobert.jpg

The traditional divisions between East and West reached their peak during the East–West Schism and the Crusades. The first seven Ecumenical Councils included

both Western and Eastern bishops, but growing differences in doctrine, theology, language, politics, and geography eventually led to mutual condemnations and excommunications. In November 1096 CE, Pope Urban II (1088–99 CE) convened the Council of Clermont to promote unity and support the Byzantines in reclaiming territories lost to the Seljuk Turks. During the council, Pope Urban II delivered an impassioned speech, urging the Christian West to aid the Christian East, which became the catalyst for the First Crusade.

This era also saw significant changes in the Papal selection process. In 1059 CE, Pope Nicholas II issued *In nomine Domini*, limiting the right to vote in Papal elections to the College of Cardinals. These reforms established the foundation for the modern Papal conclave. Cardinal Hildebrand, who later became Pope Gregory VII, played a key role in driving these changes.

5.3.6 The Wandering Popes

The Pope is traditionally recognized as the Bishop of Rome, but there is no strict requirement for him to reside there. Two centuries earlier, cardinals were mandated to stay in Rome. However, during the political instability in 13th-century Italy, the Papal court was compelled to relocate to various cities, including Viterbo, Orvieto, and Perugia. The Pope traveled with the Roman Curia, and Papal elections were held in the city where the previous Pope had died. This arrangement boosted the prestige of host cities and offered economic benefits. Yet, municipal authorities risked being absorbed into the administration of the Papal States if they allowed the Pope to remain too long.

According to Eamon Duffy, the resurgence of aristocratic factions in Rome made it an unstable base for Papal governance. Innocent IV faced exile from both Rome and Italy for six years, and all but two Papal elections in the 13th century occurred outside Rome. The city's skyline was increasingly dominated by the fortified towers of aristocratic families, prompting Popes to spend more time in Papal palaces at Viterbo and Orvieto.

5.3.7 The Avignon Papacy

The Avignon Papacy refers to the period from 1309 to 1377 CE when seven consecutive Popes, all of French origin, resided in Avignon (France) instead of Rome. These Popes included Clement V (1305–14 CE), John XXII (1316–34 CE), Benedict XII (1334–42 CE), Clement VI (1342–52 CE), Innocent VI (1352–62 CE), Urban V (1362–70 CE), and Gregory XI (1370–78 CE). During this time, the Papacy was heavily influenced by the French monarchy.

This situation resulted from a combination of historical, personal, and political factors. The conflict between the Papacy and the French crown culminated in the death of Pope Boniface VIII. After the death of Pope Benedict XI, King Philip IV of France pressured a deadlocked council to elect the Frenchman Clement V as Pope in 1305 CE. Clement, however, refused to move to Rome and instead, in 1309 CE, established his court in the Papal enclave of Avignon, where the Papacy remained for the next 67 years. Reformers like Martin Luther later referred to this period as the "Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy," drawing a parallel to the Jewish exile in Babylon for 70 years.

In 1376 CE, Pope Gregory XI decided to abandon Avignon and returned the Papal court to Rome, officially arriving on January 17, 1377 CE. However, after Gregory's death in 1378 CE, tensions between his successor, Urban VI, and a faction of cardinals led to the Western Schism. This schism resulted in a rival line of Avignon Popes, later deemed illegitimate. The last of these anti popes, Benedict XIII, lost most of his support, including that of France, in 1398 CE. After enduring a five-year siege by the French, he fled to Perpignan in 1403 CE.



Pope Gregory XI

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pope_Gregory_XI.jpg

Self-Check Exercise-1

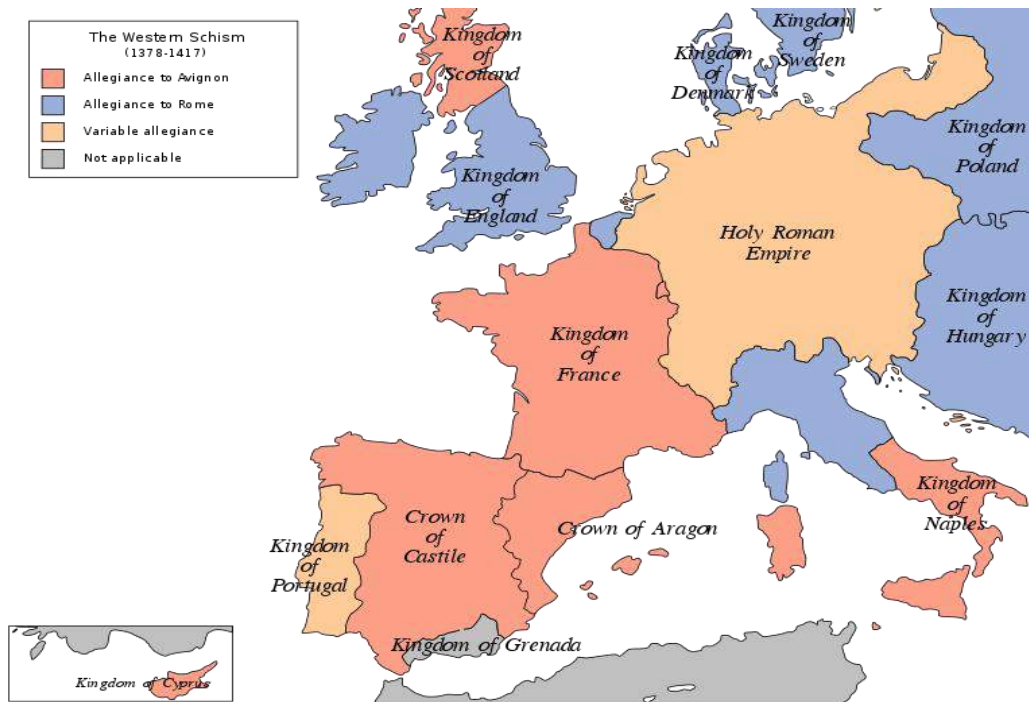
- Q.1 What was the era of Ostrogothic Papacy?
- Q.2 Which is the first recorded example of simony in the history of Papacy?
- Q.3 Why was Rome considered as the melting pot under the Greek Popes?
- Q.4 Who was the chief figure in proclaiming Papal primacy and provided stimulus to missionary activity in northern Europe, including England?
- Q.5 Which Frankish king helped Pope Stephen II to drive the Lombard's out from the territory belonging to Ravenna?
- Q.6 What is Saeculum Obscurum?
- Q.7 Name the historian who has called the period from 867 to 1049 CE as the "Nadir of Papacy".
- Q.8 What was investiture conflict?
- Q.9 Who convened the Council at Clermont in 1096 CE?
- Q.10 What was the duration of Avignon Papacy?
- Q.11 What do you understand by "Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy"?

5.4 Western Schism

The Western Schism, also known as the Papal Schism, the Vatican Standoff, the Great Occidental Schism, the Schism of 1378, the Great Controversy of the Anti-popes, or the Second Great Schism, was a division within the Catholic Church that lasted from 1378 to 1417 CE. During this period, rival claimants to the Papacy emerged, with Popes residing in both Rome and Avignon, and a third line of Pisan Popes established in 1409. The schism was driven by personal rivalries and political alliances, particularly the close association between the Avignon Papacy and the French monarchy. These competing claims severely undermined the Papacy's authority and credibility.

The conflict originated after the Papacy's return to Rome in 1377 CE, following nearly seven decades in Avignon. After Pope Gregory XI's death in 1378 CE, the College of Cardinals controversially elected both Urban VI and Clement VII as Popes, splitting the church. Despite numerous attempts at reconciliation, the Council of Pisa in 1409 CE declared both Popes illegitimate and appointed a third, anti-Pope.

To resolve the crisis, the Pisan Pope John XXIII convened the Council of Constance (1414–1418 CE) in Switzerland. The council deposed both the Roman Pope Gregory XII and the Pisan Pope John XXIII, excommunicated the Avignon Pope Benedict XIII, and elected Martin V as the sole legitimate Pope, based in Rome. His election marked the end of the thirty-year schism, restoring unity to the Catholic Church.



Western Schism

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Western_schism_1378-1417.svg

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q.1 Define Western Schism.

5.5 Summary

- The Papacy refers to the office and authority of the Pope of Rome, established as a significant institution by Pope Gregory the Great. It reached its peak between 1073 and 1294 CE.
- The Papacy was initially influenced by Italian rulers, leading to distinct periods known as the Ostrogothic, Byzantine, and Frankish Papacies. Over time, the Papacy consolidated its control over the Papal States, with powerful Roman families like the Theophylacts replacing external rulers. The period from 904 to 963 CE is often called *Saeculum Obscurum* (Latin for "the dark age").
- Between 1048 and 1257 CE, tensions escalated between the Papacy, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Byzantine Empire, ultimately resulting in the East–West Schism.

- The Avignon Papacy (1309–1377 CE) saw seven consecutive French Popes residing in Avignon rather than Rome, a period later referred to by Martin Luther and other reformers as the "Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy."
- Pope Gregory XI ended the Avignon Papacy by returning the Papal court to Rome in 1377 CE.
- The Western Schism (1378–1416 CE) was a prolonged crisis in Latin Christendom, marked by disputes over the rightful Papal claimant.
- The election of Martin V as Pope in 1417 CE restored unity to the Church and officially ended the thirty-year schism.

5.6 Glossary

Curia: A curia is an official body that governs a particular church in the Catholic Church.

Ecumenical council: Also called general council, it is a meeting of bishops and other church authorities to consider and rule on questions of Christian doctrine, administration, discipline, and other matters.

Exarchate: Any territorial jurisdiction whose ruler is described as an exarch.

Monotheism: It is a theological doctrine in Christianity, which holds Christ as having only one will.

Nadir: The lowest or most unsuccessful point in a situation.

Simony: It is the act of buying or selling of ecclesiastical privileges, for example pardons or benefices.

5.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 493 to 537 CE

Ans.2 The triumph of Pope Symmachus over Antipope Laurentius.

Ans.3 In Rome many of the traditions of the east and the west were flowing together to create a vibrant solemn religious culture.

Ans.4 Pope Gregory I

Ans.5 Pepin III

Ans.6 It was a period in the history of the Papacy during the first two-thirds of the 10th century during which the Popes were influenced strongly by a powerful and

allegedly corrupt aristocratic family, the Theophylact, and their relatives and allies.

Ans.7 Will Durant

Ans.8 The investiture conflict, also called investiture controversy, was a conflict between the church and the state in medieval Europe over the ability to choose and install bishops and abbots of monasteries and the Pope himself.

Ans.9 Pope Urban II

Ans.10 1309 to 1377 CE

Ans.11 The Avignon Papacy, also known as the Babylonian Captivity, was the period from 1309 to 1377 CE during which seven successive Popes resided in Avignon (France) rather than in Rome. It refers back to a sad time in Jewish history when the Jews spent 70 years in exile in Babylon.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 The Western Schism was a prolonged period of crisis in Latin Christendom from 1378 to 1416 CE, when there was conflict regarding the rightful holder of the Papacy.

5.8 Suggested Readings

1. Barraclough, Geoffrey, *The Medieval Papacy*, London, 1968.
2. Burns, J.H., and Thomas Izbicki (eds. and trans.), *Conciliarism and Papalism* Cambridge, 1997.
3. Duffy, Eamon, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, New Haven, 1997.
4. Morris, C., *The Papal Monarchy: the Western Church from 1050 to 1250*, Oxford, 1989.
5. Partner, Peter, *The Lands of St Peter*, London, 1972.
6. Robinson, I.S., *The Papacy 1073-1198: Continuity and Innovation*, Cambridge, 1990.
7. Sayers, Jane, *Innocent III: Leader of Europe 1198-1216*, London, 1994.
8. Ullman, Walter, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, London, 1974.
9. Ullman, Walter, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed., London, 1970, [2nd ed online]

5.9 Terminal Questions

1. Write in brief about the rise of Ostrogothic Papacy.

2. Discuss the rise and growth of Byzantine Papacy.
3. What do you know about the Frankish Papacy?
4. How was the medieval Papacy influenced by the powerful Roman families?
5. Give a brief account of the conflict between the Popes and the Holy Roman Emperors.
6. Write a short note on Avignon Papacy.
7. Give an account of Western Schism.

UNIT-6

PRE-ISLAMIC TRIBAL SOCIETY IN ARABIA

Structure

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Objectives

6.3 Tribes in Arabia

6.3.1 Dominant Tribes

6.3.2 Religious Diversity

Self-Check Exercise-1

6.4 Religion and Rituals of Pre-Islamic Arabian Tribes

6.4.1 Tribes in Mecca

6.4.2 Tribes in Medina

Self-Check Exercise-2

6.5 Trade in Arabia

Self-Check Exercise-3

6.6 Political Conditions

Self-Check Exercise-4

6.7 Social Conditions

6.7.1 Tribal Organization and Leadership

6.7.2 Inequality and Slavery

6.7.3 The Elite Camel Nomads

6.7.4 Intra-Tribal Warfare

Self-Check Exercise-5

6.8 Economic Conditions

6.8.1 Camel Nomadism

6.8.2 Agriculture

6.8.3 Industry and Mining

Self-Check Exercise-6

6.9 Literature in Pre-Islamic Arabia

Self-Check Exercise-7

6.10 Summary

6.11 Glossary

6.12 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

6.13 Suggested Readings

6.14 Terminal Questions

6.1 Introduction

Pre-Islamic Arabia refers to the Arabian Peninsula before the emergence of Islam. Known as jazirat al-arab (the island of the Arabs) in Arabic, the peninsula is bordered by the Red Sea to the west, the Persian Gulf to the east, and the Arabian Sea to the south. Today, it encompasses the modern nations of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia.

The region primarily consists of deserts and dry steppes, with limited rainfall concentrated along the coastal areas. Short bursts of rain occur during winter and spring. Arabia has no perennial rivers, but numerous oases, fed by springs and wells, provided vital resources for survival in the harsh environment.

The region was inhabited by nomadic pastoralists who identified as Arabs. For centuries, the people of Central, Northern, and Western Arabia led a nomadic lifestyle. The domestication of camels revolutionized their way of life, giving rise to a distinct form of pastoral nomadism centered on camel herding. These camel herders, known as Bedouins (derived from bdu, meaning nomad), moved from one oasis to another with their livestock.

Arab society was organized into tribes, each comprising various clans. There was no formal state structure before the rise of Islam. The Arabs relied heavily on camels for transportation and trade, cultivated limited food grains, and depended on date palms for both sustenance and economic livelihood.



Pre-Islamic Arabia

Source:https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8f/Pre_Islamic_Arabia.PNG

6.2 Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Know about various tribes in pre-Islamic Arabia,
- Understand the religions and rituals of pre-Islamic tribes of Mecca and Medina,
- Discuss trade during pre-Islamic Arabia,
- Analyze the political, social and economic conditions in the pre-Islamic Arabia,
- Describe the development of literature in pre-Islamic Arabia.

6.3 Tribes in Arabia

The people residing in Arabian Peninsula were known as Sarakenoi in Greek. They were called Saraceni in Latin and they had previously been called Scenite Arabs or the Arabs who dwell in tents. However, nomads of Arabia preferred to call themselves simply Arabs. However, the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula was full of tribal and religious diversities.

6.3.1 Dominant Tribes

By the late 5th century, Mecca came under the control of Qusayy, a member of the Quraysh tribe. This tribe, formed as an alliance of various trading clans, emerged as a dominant tribal confederation. The Quraysh were united by a shared religious identity and governed Mecca through a council of clans known as the mala. They defined their cultural identity through specific customs related to diet, dress, domestic practices, and endogamous marriages within the confederation. Active participants in local fairs and regional trade, the Quraysh also invested in agriculture alongside their commercial ventures.

The Quraysh formed alliances with neighboring tribes, including the Thaqif, a powerful tribe based in Taif, a town near Mecca known for its production of fruits and grains supplied across Arabia. Before the rise of Islam, Quraysh entrepreneurs established large estates in the Taif valleys. Historian Maxime Rodinson notes, “the history of the ensuing five hundred years may be seen in the light of the expansion of this one tribe to the dimensions of a world power.”

The Aws and Khazraj were prominent Arab tribes originally from Yemen, who migrated to Medina long before the advent of Islam. Initially, they held a weaker position compared to the three dominant Jewish tribes—Banu Nadir, Banu Qaynuqa, and Banu Qurayza. However, over time, the Aws and Khazraj gained strength, built fortresses, and cultivated date orchards. After the rise of Islam, these tribes came to be known as al-Ansar, meaning “the helpers.”

6.3.2 Religious Diversity

Before the rise of Islam, most Bedouin tribes in the Arabian Peninsula practiced polytheism, primarily in the form of animism. Idolatry and totemism were also widespread. Alongside these practices, the region was home to several other religious communities.

Major Jewish settlements were located in Khaybar and Medina, both in northern Arabia. In Medina, Jewish tribes held significant wealth, land, fortresses, and weaponry. Christianity spread to Arabia after Constantine's conquest of Byzantium in 324 CE,

becoming established in northern Arabia by the 5th century. Judaism, on the other hand, took root in southern Arabia during the 4th and 5th centuries. The Abyssinian invasion further contributed to Christian settlements in Yemen's small oases.

Christian churches were also active in eastern Arabia, and Christianity spread through merchants traveling in caravans from Najran in Arabia to Busra in Syria. Both Jewish and Christian communities existed even in the central western region known as Hijaz (Hejaz). In the oases of Hijaz, Jewish settlers expanded agricultural land, especially through date palm plantations. Some Arab families also converted to Judaism.

Medina itself had a significant Jewish population, with many nomadic tribes adopting either Judaism or Christianity. In Medina, Jewish settlements were spread across both Lower Medina (Safila, in the north) and Upper Medina (Aliya, in the south). The Qurayza and Nadir tribes lived in Upper Medina, while the Qaynuqa tribe resided in Safila. The Nadir tribe also owned estates outside Aliya and along its periphery.

The cultural and religious landscape of pre-Islamic Arabia also reflected influences from Iraqi Aramaic traditions, with Syrian and Iraqi saints and ascetics venerated along the northern Arabian borders.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Q.1 Write a note on the dominant tribes in pre-Islamic Arabia.

Q.2 Briefly discusses the religious diversity in the Arabian Peninsula during pre-Islamic times.

Q.3 Name the two most prominent tribes in Medina.

6.4 Religion and Rituals of Pre-Islamic Arabian Tribes

The tribes of Mecca and Medina primarily practiced idolatry before the rise of Islam, although their religious traditions varied slightly.

6.4.1 Tribes in Mecca

Before the advent of Islam, the Arabs were predominantly polytheistic, worshipping multiple gods while believing in a supreme deity called Allah, whose house was the Kaaba. Allah was considered the highest god, exerting power over all other tribal deities. The Meccans created idols in various shapes and sizes, with household idols being the most common. Hubal was regarded as the chief god of Mecca.

A significant ritual that fostered unity among the Meccan tribes was the pilgrimage (Hajj) to the Kaaba, a cube-shaped structure housing numerous idols and sacred objects. Among these objects was the revered Black Stone, embedded into the shrine's wall, symbolizing the merging of different tribal cults into a unified practice.

Three prominent goddesses—Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Al-Manat—were especially venerated in Mecca. Al-Lat symbolized the "Goddess," Al-Uzza represented might and protection, while Al-Manat was associated with fate. Their idols were kept within the Kaaba. Worshippers expressed reverence by circumambulating the Kaaba a specific number of times and touching the sacred stones, particularly the Black Stone located in one corner.

Another significant sacred site near the Kaaba was the Zamzam well (Quraysh al-Bataih), which held great spiritual significance for the people of Mecca.



Goddess Al-Lat

Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d6/Allat.jpg>

The people of Mecca also believed in the existence of minor spiritual beings known as jinns, who could either assist or harm humans. To ward off harmful spirits, magical practices were employed, while benevolent jinns were appeased through rituals. Each spirit was associated with a specific shrine, such as a tree, grove, or rock formation. Additionally, the Meccans believed in the divinity of stars.

6.4.2 Tribes in Medina

In Medina, idol worship was similarly linked to various levels of tribal organization, with household idols being the most common. Noblemen also possessed personal idols, each with a distinct name. Alongside these, smaller tribal groups maintained their own

idols, known as batns, which were housed in sanctuaries called bayts, where sacrifices were offered.

Huzam was an idol of higher status than the batns, and sacrifices were made in its honor as well. The Khazraj tribe worshipped an idol called Al-Khamis, while both the Aws and Khazraj venerated Al-Saida, located on Mount Uhud, north of Medina. Superstitious beliefs and magical practices were widespread, with amulets commonly used to protect against the evil eye.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q.1 Write a short note on the religion and ritual practices followed by the people of Mecca and Medina.

Q.2 Match the following:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| (i) Hubal | (a) Goddess of Fate |
| (ii) Huzam | (b) God of Mecca |
| (iii) Al-Mannat | (c) Medina |

6.5 Trade in Arabia

The Hijaz region emerged as the most significant trade hub of western and central Arabia, gaining prominence in the 6th century due to its strategic location. It lay at the intersection of two major trade routes—one running north to south, connecting Palestine to Yemen, and the other linking Ethiopia and the Red Sea in the west with the Persian Gulf in the east.

Mecca's importance was further enhanced by its status as a pilgrimage center, a feature that the local trading community likely promoted to strengthen its economic standing. Since agricultural opportunities were limited, trade became the backbone of Mecca's economy. The city hosted a thriving colony of traders along the Hijaz route. According to Ira M. Lapidus, Mecca's pilgrimage not only fulfilled religious needs but also served as a platform for dispute resolution, debt settlements, and commercial exchanges.

By the mid-6th century, the Quraysh tribe had established dominance over trade routes connecting northeastern Arabia with Yemen and Abyssinia. They also controlled much of the internal trade.

Arabian trade extended beyond regional boundaries, connecting the peninsula with the broader world. Merchants imported spices, textiles, jewelry, weapons, grain, and wine, while exporting hides, leather, and livestock. Arabian markets intersected with the eastern and southern coasts of the Indian Ocean. Caravans linked the prosperous regions of southern Arabia with the Fertile Crescent, transporting goods from India, East Africa, and the Far East, as well as from the Mediterranean world. The Bedouins exerted control over all goods passing through their territories.

During the 6th century, a significant occupational shift occurred in Arabia. Several tribes transitioned from nomadic pastoralism to trade as their primary livelihood, particularly in the Hijaz region, where Mecca became a prominent trading hub. This transformation was accelerated by the Sassanid-Byzantine conflict, which disrupted traditional trade routes through the Persian Gulf and Iraq. Consequently, trade was redirected through the Red Sea and overland from Yemen to Syria, making the Hijaz route more significant.

Yemen soon became a crucial transit point for international trade, further elevating the importance of the Hijaz. As a result of this restructured trade network, Mecca, being a major settlement along the Hijaz route, rose to prominence in the 6th century.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q.1 Name the most important trading center of western and central Arabia.

Q.2 What was the backbone of the economy of Mecca in the pre-Islamic Arabia?

6.6 Political Conditions

Before the rise of Islam, Arabia lacked any form of centralized political organization. There was no recognized ruler across the region until the establishment of Medina. Apart from Yemen in the southwest, no part of the Arabian Peninsula had ever

experienced formal governance. The tribal system was the sole political structure known to the Arabs. There were no written laws, nor any state apparatus to enforce regulations. Arabs recognized only the authority of their tribal leaders, whose influence depended largely on personal character and lineage-based loyalty.

The tribal leader, known as the **Sayyid** or **Sheikh-i-Qabilah**, was responsible for the tribe's defense, dispute resolution, and the protection of sacred symbols. However, the chief could not impose his authority on any family or clan. Tribe members were free to sever ties and leave with their families at any time.

There was no common judicial system. In the absence of legal institutions, social order was maintained through the principle of blood-feud retaliation. Any harm inflicted by an outsider on a group member was treated as an offense against the entire group, leading to collective enmity. Avenging such dishonor was seen as a matter of pride, following the principle of “**an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life.**”

Self-Check Exercise-4

Q.1 What was the only type of political system known in pre-Islamic Arabia?

Q.2 What was the tribal chief in pre-Islamic Arabia known as?

6.7 Social Conditions

Pre-Islamic Arabian society was predominantly patriarchal, with women having little to no social status. Female infanticide was a common practice. The primary economic activity was camel-based nomadic pastoralism, which shaped the region's social structure. The internal dynamics of these clan-based tribal groups are discussed below:

6.7.1 Tribal Organization and Leadership

Arabian society was tribal in nature, consisting of nomadic, semi-nomadic, and settled populations. The Bedouins developed a distinct social structure centered around constant movement, making their lifestyle a defining characteristic of the region. Only a small portion of the population lived a settled existence.

The Bedouins' social organization revolved around the qabila (tribe), which comprised closely-knit kinship groups or clans. Historian Marshall Hodgson distinguished larger units as tribes and smaller units as clans. Each tribe traced its ancestry—whether real or mythical—to a common forefather. As populations grew, clans often separated from their parent tribes due to the desert's limited resources, ensuring that each group remained sustainable in size. The tribal system reinforced a sense of equality among the Bedouins, where every member was considered equal.

A system of hereditary social and economic unity existed among families. Smaller family groups formed alliances for economic purposes, while larger ones banded together for political strength. Each group maintained internal autonomy, possessing its own grazing lands, defending its territorial rights, and seeking to expand its influence when possible.

Although the tribal system was largely egalitarian, leadership rested with a tribal chief. The elders of the clan selected the chief from among the most prominent families. While the position could be hereditary, personal merit played a crucial role in leadership selection. A chief had to exhibit qualities such as generosity, wisdom, courage, and diplomacy to retain the loyalty of his followers. He was expected to act with moderation, uphold tribal customs, and assert his authority while maintaining the goodwill of his people.

6.7.2 Inequality and Slavery

Wealth accumulation through plunder, trade, and preying on settled tribes or other nomads led to social differentiation among Arabian tribes. Certain families and clans prospered, while others remained poor. Some clans, like those of smiths, were viewed as inferior by the rest of society. The wealthy often kept slaves, both male and female, who were bought and sold like livestock, forming the most oppressed class in Arabian society. However, the nomadic lifestyle was not conducive to maintaining slavery, leading to frequent emancipation. These freed slaves, known as mawla, remained dependents of their former masters.

6.7.3 The Elite Camel Nomads

In the desert regions of Arabia, the Bedouins, or camel nomads, were considered elite. Islamic scholars like Ibn Khaldun highlighted their advantages, noting that camel herders surpassed sheep herders in mobility, enabling them to travel long distances between water sources. Alongside camels, they often possessed horses used for raiding. While sheep and goat herders lived closer to agricultural lands, their dependence on such areas made them vulnerable to more mobile groups. Pure camel nomads were more resourceful and mobile than both other pastoralists and agriculturists. Farmers often paid tribute, known as khuwwa, to the Bedouins for protection and immunity from plunder, as the Bedouins held a military advantage.

6.7.4 Intra-Tribal Warfare

Inter-tribal relations were marked by conflict, primarily driven by poverty and the lure of wealth. Many tribes engaged in ghazwa, or raids, against their neighbors. Warfare was more than a means of survival; it was a form of recreation and an escape from the monotonous desert life. It provided opportunities for tribesmen to showcase their combat skills, earn glory, and bring honor to their tribes. These raids followed established traditions and adhered to specific customary rules.

Self-Check Exercise-5

Q.1 What was Mawla?

Q.2 Define Khuwwa.

Q.3 Write a short note on tribal organization and leadership in pre-Islamic Arabia.

6.8 Economic Conditions

Camel rearing served as the primary livelihood for the Bedouins, while sedentary communities settled around oases engaged in agriculture. Additionally, some Arabs participated in mining activities.

6.8.1 Camel Nomadism

The vast expanse of desert across the Arabian Peninsula naturally fostered a nomadic, pastoral lifestyle. By the second millennium BCE, the inhabitants had domesticated camels, perfectly suited for desert conditions. These camel herders, known as Bedouins, formed a significant social force as camel nomadism evolved.

This lifestyle thrived mainly in the northern, western, and central regions of Arabia. Camels offered greater mobility than other livestock, capable of traveling for three weeks without food or water, even in temperatures reaching 50°C. As the most efficient means of desert transport, camels enabled exploration and exploitation of the desert's scarce resources. Besides being beasts of burden, they provided milk, meat, and hides, ensuring both sustenance and commercial value.

This advantage allowed the Bedouins to dominate desert oases and extend their influence into nearby settled areas. They engaged in trade and, under favorable conditions, collected tribute. Camel nomads also played a crucial role in facilitating commerce between the Mediterranean region and the southern seas.

6.8.2 Agriculture

Small farming communities in Arabia cultivated cereals, while those near oases focused on date palm cultivation. Dates, fruits, and some grains were grown using natural springs or wells. The date palm, often called the "mother and aunt" of the Arabs, provided not only fruit but also useful byproducts from every part of the tree. Dates and camel milk formed the staple diet of the region's inhabitants.

However, frequent Bedouin raids on settled communities made pastoralism more significant than agriculture in the desert economy. In contrast, agriculture thrived in Oman and Bahrain, with Bahrain exporting grains to Mecca. Interestingly, the Bedouin camel herders themselves cultivated date palms, fruits, and vegetables. The interdependence between Bedouins, peasants, and townsfolk fostered a need for peaceful coexistence.

6.8.3 Industry and Mining

Arabia housed several economically productive regions. The Sassanids promoted silver and copper mining in Yemen, while similar activities occurred in eastern Arabia. Yemen also became a hub for leather and cloth production. In north-central Arabia, the town of Al-Rabadha, located on the Kufa-Medina route, produced glass, metal, ceramics, and soapstone goods.

Self-Check Exercise-6

Q.1 Write a note on camel nomadism in pre-Islamic Arabia.

Q.2 What was known as the 'mother and aunt' of the Arabs?

6.9 Literature in Pre-Islamic Arabia

Despite the instability of tribal society, literature flourished in pre-Islamic Arabia, standing out as an exception among the arts. The region's political, social, economic, and religious complexities fostered a vibrant and sophisticated cultural environment.

Arabia was linguistically diverse, though the most commonly spoken language was a Semitic dialect derived from Aramaic. By the late 5th century, a distinct Arabic linguistic identity had emerged. The Arabic script itself appeared about a century before the rise of Islam, evolving either from the Nabataean script or directly from Syriac, later refined by the Armanean Jews.

Arabic also held religious significance. In the 4th century, Iraqi and Himyarite Christians translated the Old and New Testaments into Arabic, and Christian liturgies and prayer books were prepared in the language. This common tongue helped unify the otherwise fragmented Arab tribes. Historian Patricia Crone described the Arabs of the 6th century as exhibiting remarkable "cultural homogeneity."

The most notable expression of the Arabic language was its rich tradition of oral poetry, highly esteemed among the Arabs. Around 500 CE, poets began composing verses in Arabic, primarily in a distinctive form known as *rajaz*. Each tribe had its own poets who often composed extempore, narrating tales of tribal valor and glory.

Beyond rajaz, a more refined poetic form known as qasida or ode also developed. These long, lyrical compositions could be sung and were particularly popular in their muallaqat, or "suspended poems," form. These celebrated works were widely admired across the Arabian Peninsula. Imrul Qays, one of the earliest and most acclaimed muallaqat poets, is considered the foremost literary figure of pre-Islamic Arabia. Other prominent poets included Tarafa, Zuhayr, and Labid, each representing different tribes. The widespread recitation of these poems helped standardize the Arabic language.

Self-Check Exercise-7

Q.1 Define qasida.

Q.2 Name the foremost poet of pre-Islamic Arabia.

6.10 Summary

- Pre-Islamic Arabia refers to the Arabian Peninsula before the rise of Islam, primarily inhabited by nomadic pastoralists who identified as Arabs.
- The Bedouins, or camel pastoralists (from bdu, meaning nomad), migrated from one oasis to another with their livestock.
- Arab society was divided into tribes, with no centralized state before Islam. Mecca fell under the control of the Quraysh tribe in the 5th century.
- The Aws and Khazraj, prominent Arab tribes from Yemen, migrated to Medina long before Islam emerged.
- Most Bedouin tribes practiced polytheism, particularly animism, alongside idolatry and totemism. Christianity and Judaism were also prevalent.
- The Hijaz region became the leading trade hub of western and central Arabia by the 6th century, connecting Arabia to the wider world.
- Before Islam, there was no formal political organization in Arabia. Each tribe was led by a chief known as Sayyid or Sheikh-i-Qabilah.
- Arabian society was patriarchal, with women holding little to no social status. Camel nomadism was the dominant social and economic structure.
- The population comprised nomadic, semi-nomadic, and settled communities, with each tribe tracing its lineage to a real or mythical ancestor.

- Social inequality arose as some families gained wealth through trade, plunder, or exploitation of other tribes. Wealthy clans often owned slaves.
- In the deep desert, Bedouin camel nomads were considered elites due to their mobility and military advantage. Tribes frequently engaged in ghazwa (raids).
- The Bedouins relied primarily on camel rearing, while settled communities near oases practiced agriculture, cultivating dates, fruits, and grains using natural springs and wells.
- Arabia's economy was diverse, with developed regions engaged in industry and mining, including silver, copper, leather, and textile production.
- Literature thrived in pre-Islamic Arabia, with Aramaic being the most commonly spoken language. Oral poetry, especially rajaz and qasida, was a hallmark of Arabic culture, with each tribe boasting its own poets.

6.11 Glossary

Fertile Crescent: A crescent-shaped region encompassing modern-day Iraq, Israel, Palestinian territories, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, southern Turkey, and western Iran.

Hajj: The pilgrimage to Mecca that every adult Muslim is expected to undertake at least once in their lifetime.

Nomads: A member of a people that travel from place to place to find fresh pasture for its animals and has no permanent home.

Totemism: A system of belief in which humans are said to have kinship or a mystical relationship with a spirit-being, such as an animal or plant.

6.12 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Refer to sub-section 6.3.1

Ans.2 Refer to sub-section 6.3.2

Ans.3 Aws and Khazraj

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 Refer to sub-section 6.4.1 and 6.4.2

Ans.2 (i) b (ii) c (iii) c

Self-Check Exercise-3

Ans.1 Hijaz

Ans.2 Mercantile activity

Self-Check Exercise-4

Ans.1 Tribal system

Ans.2 Sayyid or Sheikh-i-qabilah

Self-Check Exercise-5

Ans.1 In pre-Islamic Arabia the freed slaves were called as Mawla.

Ans.2 The tribute collected by the Beduoin nomads from the agriculturalists for their protection was known as khuwwa.

Ans.3 Refer to sub-section 6.7.1

Self-Check Exercise-6

Ans.1 Refer to sub-section 6.7.1

Ans.2 Date palm

Self-Check Exercise-7

Ans.1 A highly evolved form of poetry that developed in pre-Islamic Arabia was called qasida.

Ans.2 Imrul Qays

6.13 Suggested Readings

1. Crone Patricia, Mecca n Trade and the Rise of Islam, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
2. Farooqui, Amar, Early Social Formations, New Delhi: Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd., Revised Edition, 2002.
3. Hodgson, Marshall G.S., The Venture of Islam, Volume I, The Classical Age of Islam, Lahore: Vanguard Books Pvt Ltd, 2004.
4. Holt, P.M., Ann K.S. Lambton and Bernanrd Lewis, (ed.), The Cambridge History of Islam, Volume I, The Central Islamic Lands, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

5. Lapidus, Ira M., *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
6. Robinson, Chase F., (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume I, The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
7. Rodinson, Maxime, Mohammed, Allen Lane: The Penguin Press, 1971.

6.14 Terminal Questions

1. Describe the tribal confederations in the pre-Islamic Arabia.
2. Give an account of the religious and ritual practices of pre-Islamic tribals of Mecca and Medina.
3. What do you know about the Arab trading network before the 6th century?
4. Explain the political structure in pre-Islamic Arabia.
5. Describe the chief features of the pre-Islamic Arabian society.
6. Analyze the economic conditions of the pre-Islamic Arabia.
7. Account for the growth of literature in the pre-Islamic Arabia.

UNIT-7

RISE OF ISLAM

Structure

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Objectives

7.3 Prophet and his Teachings

7.3.1 Life of Prophet Muhammad

7.3.2 Teachings of Prophet Muhammad

7.3.2.1 Declaration of Faith (Shahda)

7.3.2.2 Daily Prayers (Salat)

7.3.2.3 Alms (Zakat)

7.3.2.4 Fasting (Saum)

7.3.2.5 Pilgrimage (Hajj)

7.3.2.6 Monotheism (Tawhid)

7.3.2.7 Belief in the Angels

7.3.2.8 Belief in the Prophets and Messengers

7.3.2.9 Belief in the Holy Books

7.3.2.10 Belief in the Day of Judgment

7.3.2.11 Belief in Predestination

Self-Check Exercise-1

7.4 Theories Pertaining to the Rise of Islam: Historiography

7.4.1 Meccan Trade Hypothesis

7.4.2 Nativist Theory

7.4.3 Revisionist Theory

Self-Check Exercise-2

7.5 Summary

7.6 Glossary

7.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

7.8 Suggested Readings

7.9 Terminal Questions

7.1 Introduction

Islam emerged in the beginning of the 7th century CE in the Arabian Peninsula in modern Saudi Arabia. It was in this region that Prophet Muhammad laid the foundation of Islam but also a new civilization that expanded to the entire Near East within two centuries of the death of Prophet. The rise of Islam had a huge impact on West Asia, Europe and Central Asia and changed the course of the history of the World. Islam is believed to be one of the youngest, great world religions. Islam is an Arabic word which means “surrender” or “submission”. The followers of this religion are called as Muslims.

7.2 Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life of Prophet Muhammad,
- Understand the teachings of Prophet Muhammad,
- Analyze the various theories pertaining to the rise of Islam.

7.3 Prophet and his Teachings

When Islam first emerged in Arabia, there was hardly any indication that within 150 years it would dominate the entire Middle East, northern Africa and Spain. The early spread of Islam was directly related to the revelations and work of Prophet Muhammad.

7.3.1 Life of Prophet Muhammad

The information about the early life of Prophet Muhammad is quite sketchy. Most of the Muslim sources dealing with his career have been written more than one and a half century after the actual event. However, our information related to the life of Muhammad is more abundant in comparison with the founders of other religions. These sources comprise the holy Quran which is considered as God’s revelations through Gabriel (the angel) to Muhammad and which is the ultimate source of Muslim religious belief. Another important source of Prophet’s life and his teachings is hadis or hadith. It deals mainly with the ritual, moral and other religious aspects of the Muslims. The other sources are based on oral traditions and written accounts such as the biography of Muhammad written by Ibn Ishaq. Which was later on revised by Ibn Hisham.

There is a consensus that the Prophet Muhammad was born in 570 CE in Mecca. His birth was considered auspicious by many because a terrible epidemic which was ravaging Arabia suddenly ended. Muhammad belonged to the prominent clan Banu

Hashim of the Quraysh tribe. Besides being prominent traders, the Hashim tribe had also been the caretaker of the holy well called Zamzam at Mecca. However, the Hashims had lost their prominence in the caravan trade by the time Prophet Muhammad was born. Muhammad's father Abdullah, died before his birth. He also lost his mother in his childhood. He was brought up by his grandfather and later by his uncle Abu Talib, who was fairly well-to-do merchant. Due to poverty Muhammad could not receive any formal education but he was trained to look after sheep and camels. As a youth he spent most of his time in travelling with the caravans into southern Arabia and Syria. Muhammad was known to many for his sincerity and honesty. They called him 'Amin'. Muslim sources suggest that when Muhammad grew up he found employment with a wealthy widow-merchant named Khadija who traded with Syria and Palestine. Muhammad assisted her with her enterprise. Later, at the age of 25 Muhammad married Khadija who was much older and had two sons (who died early) and had many daughters among whom Fatima became popular. She was married to Ali. Fatima became the mother of two much-revered sons, Hasan and Hussain.

From his early youth Muhammad was of religious bent and practiced meditation. He pondered much on the religious life of his fellowmen. During his travels he had met many Jews and the Christians whose monotheistic ideas had deep influence on him. He spent most of his time in religious meditations. Occasionally, he would visit Mount Hira, near Mecca, for meditation and fasting. Many a times he felt into trance and uttered words which came to be recorded by his early disciples. Later they constituted a part of Quran. As per the sources, it was during one his meditational exercises in 610 CE at Mount Hira that Muhammad (at the age of 40) had a spiritual experience in the form of a series of God's revelations which became the basis of his religious mission. He realized that he was the chief messenger, or Prophet, of the Supreme being-Allah and therefore had the great mission to fulfil. These revelations showed him the vision of a great and just God (Allah) who would give reward or punishment to an individual on the basis of their good or bad deeds on the day of the judgment (last day of an individual human being on this earth). The thoughts of desirability of the charity and piety and the fear of pride in human power, attachment to worldly things, neglect of the poor and almsgiving

became the operational features of these revelations. These revelations form the Quran, the religious book of the Muslims.

Initially, it was Khadija who believed in Muhammad's Prophet hood, but later from 613 CE onwards Muhammad had started preaching a small group of his followers in Mecca who had accepted his religious ideas. They came to be known as Muslim (plural Muslimun), i.e. those who had submitted (to Allah). The religion itself was denoted by the term Islam, which means submission, derived from the same root as the word Muslim. Khadija, Abu Bakr and Ali were the earliest followers of Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet started preaching the principles of his new faith to the Meccans. But since majority of the people of Mecca practiced a polytheistic religion, there was strong opposition to the strict monotheistic ideology of Prophet Muhammad. Even the members of the Quraysh tribe opposed his preaching and ridiculed the concept of the last Day of Judgment (qiyama) and resurrection, and they also called him as kabin or fortuneteller. Thus, the general attitude of the Meccans remained hostile. The priests of the temple of Kaaba were alarmed and they opposed the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. However, he continued to preach the tenets of Islam with the support of his clan, Khadija and Abu Talib. But the unfortunate death of both Khadija and Abu Talib in 619 CE made it difficult for him to preach in Mecca. His followers too were subjected to social and economic boycott. According to Ira M. Lapidus, the new religion threatened to dissolve the old order of the society and to create a new one. Thus, confronted with this kind of ostracism and gradual loss of support from the Hashim clan, Prophet Muhammad decided to move to Medina (Yathrib) in 622 CE. Muhammad's retreat to Medina with a group of 75 followers (muhajirun) is considered as the most important year for Islam and it was called Hijrah or Hejira (Emigration). It is the beginning of the Islamic calendar and was determined to be July 16, 622 CE. It is considered as the beginning of the Islamic era to commemorate Muhammad's emigration from Mecca to Medina.

It was in Medina the Prophet Muhammad could get warm reception to his new faith. He gathered a large number of disciples. His supporters in Medina were known as ansar (helpers). His fame and that of his new faith began to spread rapidly all over Arabia. By the end of his life he had laid the foundations of a political structure in

Medina based on Islam. He was no longer just a religious leader, but the head of an emerging state centered on Medina. He started laying down the rules for governance. His followers constituted the army. He entered into alliances with the neighboring tribes. Many tribes embraced the new faith thereby becoming part of the Muslim religious community known as ummah. Income for running the state came from the raids. One-fifth of the booty went directly to the Prophet. Additionally, regular voluntary contributions were levied on the tribes which accepted Muhammad's leadership. This gradually developed into a tax known as zakat which was extracted from all the Muslims of the state.

Now the Prophet was in a position to wage a war against the Quraysh of Mecca. A major victory for the forces of early Islam was the battle of Badr in 624 CE where the Prophet defeated a large Meccan army. This victory not only dented the supremacy of the Meccans but also enhanced Muhammad's prestige in the entire Arabia. The successful raids against the Quraysh trading caravans disrupted the Meccan trade. However, he faced some reverses at the hands of Meccan forces in 625 CE at Uhud and in 627 CE at Ditch. As a result, a truce was reached with the Meccans and the Muslims were allowed to perform pilgrimage at Mecca for three days but the Meccans refused to recognize Muhammad as their Prophet.

Muhammad attacked Mecca in 630 CE and forced the Meccan leaders to surrender the city. The citizens of Mecca embraced Islam en masse. Ira M. Lapidus opines that the victory over Mecca was also the culmination of the tribal policy of Muhammad as by the end of his life, he was able to create a large-scale Arabian federation of oases and tribes. Thus, he provided a solution to the destructive anarchy in Arabia. Along with this, all the idols and other objects of worship at Kaaba in Mecca were removed. The Islamic symbol which was located in Kaaba was a black stone which was traditionally associated with Abraham. Abraham was considered as the common ancestor of all the Arabs. Kaaba was declared as the holiest shrine of Islam. Mecca became the focal point of the most sacred pilgrimage (hajj) of the Muslims. Prophet Muhammad passed away in 632 CE. He sowed the seeds of a new religion called Islam in Arabia, and in the course of time it became one of the great religions of the world.



The Kaaba in Mecca

Source:[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Kaaba#/media/File:Kabaa_\(January_2003\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Kaaba#/media/File:Kabaa_(January_2003).jpg)

7.3.2 Teachings of Prophet Muhammad

Not all of the early teachings of Prophet Muhammad were new. Modern scholars believe that there are many similarities between the Quran and the principles of Judaism and Christianity. Similarity with Christianity has been found in the last Day of Judgment which was also preached by Syrian monks and missionaries at the fairs of Arabia. Whereas similarity with Judaism have been found in such characteristics as strict monotheism, belief in written revelations and the concept of a chosen messenger. In fact, some were much like the teachings of Judaism and Christianity. Muhammad's teachings challenged and upset the people of Arabia. It changed many aspects of the life of Arabians.

7.3.2.1 Declaration of Faith (Shahada)

Muhammad taught that there is no deity except Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet. The core belief of Islam is expressed in the phrase: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" (la ilaha illa Allah, Muhammadur rasul Allah). This declaration, known as the kalma, is fundamental to the Islamic faith. It is often inscribed in Arabic calligraphy on architectural structures, religious texts, and everyday

objects, including the Quran. Reciting this phrase with sincerity marks the acceptance of Islam.

According to Muhammad, God communicates His will through prophets, and he proclaimed himself as the final prophet. He strongly opposed idol worship and urged his followers to submit completely to the Almighty Allah, the Most Merciful, without whose grace one cannot enter paradise after death. Those who reject this belief would face punishment in hell. Muhammad also emphasized equality among all believers, urging them to live as brothers, as everyone is equal in the eyes of God.

7.3.2.2 Daily Prayers (Salat)

Muhammad preached that every Muslim is expected to pray five times a day: at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and bed-time. The five daily prayers of salat are:

1. Morning (Fajr): This prayer is supposed be offered in the morning before sunrise. It is forbidden to pray during the time of rising sun, because that may give the appearance of sun worship.
2. Midday (Zuhr): The time for this prayer is early afternoon, starting with the decline of the sun to mid-afternoon.
3. Afternoon (Asr): This Prayer is offered in the late afternoon but no later than half an hour before sunset.
4. Sunset (Maghrib): The time for this prayer is shortly after sunset. It must not be said while the sun is setting.
5. Nighttime (Isa): This prayer should be offered after nightfall when it is dark. It can be said up to midnight.



Maghrib Prayer in Masjid Al-Haram

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maghrib_Prayer_in_Masjid_Al-Haram.jpg

7.3.2.2 Daily Prayers (Salat)

Prayer involves reciting the opening chapter (sura) of the Quran and is often performed on a prayer mat specifically used for this purpose. Muslims can pray individually or in congregation at a mosque, where an imam leads the prayer. During prayer, worshippers bow several times while standing, then kneel and touch their foreheads to the ground or prayer mat as a sign of submission to Allah. On Fridays, men gather at the mosque for the midday prayer and listen to a sermon (khutba). While women are welcome to attend, they are not obligated to do so. Following the prayer, the imam delivers a sermon based on a Quranic passage, offers prayers, and discusses a specific religious topic.

7.3.2.3 Alms (Zakat)

According to Islamic law, Muslims are required to contribute a fixed portion of their income to support the poor, needy travelers, freedom of slaves, and charitable causes. This practice is known as zakat, which literally means "purification." It purifies both the giver and the wealth being shared. Many wealthy Muslims and rulers have built mosques, fountains, hospitals, schools, and

other institutions as part of their religious duty and to earn the blessings associated with charity.

7.3.2.4 Fasting (Saum)

During the holy month of Ramadan, all healthy adult Muslims are expected to fast from dawn to dusk, refraining from food, drink, smoking, and conjugal relations during daylight hours. Fasting serves to purify the body and soul, strengthen spiritual discipline, and bring the believer closer to Allah. However, certain groups, such as the chronically ill, elderly, pregnant, and menstruating women, are exempt from fasting. They can compensate by feeding the poor. This temporary deprivation encourages gratitude for God's blessings, including the Quran, which was first revealed during Ramadan. Fasting also fosters empathy by allowing Muslims to experience the hunger and thirst faced by the underprivileged, reinforcing the importance of charity and compassion.

7.3.2.5 Pilgrimage (Hajj)

Muslims who are physically and financially able are required to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia) at least once in their lifetime.

At the heart of the pilgrimage is the Kaaba, a cubical structure draped in black embroidered cloth, located within the Haram Mosque. Muslims believe that Abraham built the Kaaba as a house of worship for God and face its direction (qibla) during daily prayers.

Since the time of Prophet Muhammad, believers from around the world have gathered around the Kaaba between the 8th and 12th days of the final month of the Islamic lunar calendar to fulfill this sacred obligation.

The Hajj serves as a striking reminder of the unity of God and it accentuates the brotherhood and equality of human beings, as well as the importance of man's willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of his Creator.

The above mentioned five teachings are known as **five pillars of Islam**. They constitute the basic requirements of Islamic practice and are accepted by Muslims all over the world, irrespective of ethnic, regional or sectarian differences.

7.3.2.6 Monotheism (Tawhid)

The chief message of Islam is monotheism. Muslims believe that there is only one God who created the universe and everything within it. Therefore, we must devote our true and pure love only to this one God. Since only God can truly harm us, then we should only fear God and not fear anyone or anything else more than we fear God.

7.3.2.7 Belief in the Angels

The Muslims believe that God created angels just like He created human beings. However, humans were given free will, whereas angels are always obedient to the will of God. Angels perform the tasks given to them by God. For example, the angel Gabriel is responsible for communicating the revelations from God to the Prophets and Messengers.

7.3.2.8 Belief in the Prophets and Messengers

Muslims believe that God created humanity and desires for people to lead righteous and fulfilling lives. To prevent misguidance, God will hold every individual accountable for their actions. To guide humanity, God sent Prophets and Messengers, who were ordinary human beings chosen to receive divine revelations through the angel Gabriel and convey God's message to others.

7.3.2.9 Belief in the Holy Books

Muslims believe that God revealed sacred texts to guide humanity toward righteousness and discourage the worship of idols. These divine messages also aimed to establish laws that promote justice and ensure a peaceful and meaningful life. These Holy Books include the Quran (revealed to Muhammad), the Torah (revealed to Moses), the Gospel (revealed to Jesus), the Psalms (revealed to David), and the Scrolls (revealed to Abraham). While Muslims believe these earlier scriptures were divinely revealed, they hold that

only the Quran remains unaltered, preserved as it was originally revealed to Prophet Muhammad.

7.3.2.10 Belief in the Day of Judgment

Muslims believe that on the Day of Judgment, every individual will be held accountable for their deeds, regardless of how insignificant they may seem. As God is just, He will ensure that those who engaged in wrongdoing—such as stealing, cheating, and harming others—face punishment. Conversely, those who followed God's guidance will be rewarded with paradise, while those who rejected it will face punishment in hell.

7.3.2.11 Belief in Predestination

This article of faith emphasizes the role of God's will in shaping life events. Muslims believe that everything happens according to divine decree, and individuals should respond to blessings with gratitude and challenges with patience. However, this belief does not contradict free will. While God's knowledge encompasses the past, present, and future, humans are granted freedom of choice. God does not control human actions, but allows events to unfold according to His will. If God chooses to prevent or enforce an event, He is fully capable of doing so.

The six core beliefs outlined above form the foundation of Islamic faith, as described in the Quran and Hadith. They are collectively known as the Six Articles of Faith in Islam.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Q.1 When and where was Prophet Muhammad born?

Q.2 To which tribe did Prophet Muhammad belonged?

Q.3 What is Hijrah?

Q.4 When was the Battle of Badr fought?

Q.5 When did Prohet Muhammad passed away?

Q.6 What is Kaaba?

Q.7 Name the five daily prayers (salat) in Islam.

Q.8 Define Zakat.

Q.9 What do you understand by Saum?

Q.10 What is Day of Judgment in Islam?

7.4 Theories on the Rise of Islam: Historiographical Perspectives

The rise of Islam has sparked extensive debate among historians, leading to the development of three prominent theories, as outlined below:

7.4.1 Meccan Trade Hypothesis

Proposed by W.M. Watt, the Meccan Trade Hypothesis attributes the rise of Islam to socio-economic transformations in Arabian society. Watt argued that the growth of Meccan trade and the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle by some tribes led to prosperity for a few but also created social inequalities and tribal conflicts. The wealth generated from trade and pilgrim activities was unevenly distributed, resulting in social stratification and economic dependence of the poor on the rich. Watt contended that the Quraysh tribe, dominant in Meccan trade, lacked mechanisms to address these challenges. In response, Prophet Muhammad sought to unite the tribes under a new faith, promoting social justice and rejecting hierarchical class structures. Islam provided a framework for state formation in Arabia and aimed to replace tribal affiliations with a unified community (Ummah). Watt's hypothesis gained support from other scholars like Maxime Rodinson and Marshall G.S. Hodgson, who further expanded on his ideas.

7.4.2 Nativist Theory

Patricia Crone challenged Watt's Meccan Trade Hypothesis, presenting an alternative view in her work *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*. Crone argued that Mecca's trade primarily involved goods of mass consumption, not luxury commodities,

and thus was incapable of generating significant wealth or causing social disparities. She contended that Quranic sources do not reflect widespread social distress or inequality in Arabian society. According to Crone, the traditional tribal order remained intact and continued to function effectively. She highlighted that Muhammad's teachings gained wider acceptance in Medina, not Mecca, suggesting that the problems Muhammad addressed were more relevant to Medina's context. Meccans, adhering to their traditional lifestyle, initially resisted Islam. Crone proposed that Arab acceptance of Islam stemmed from their pragmatic approach to religion. Arabs were flexible in their loyalties and found the monotheistic message appealing as it united tribes under one God, dismissing ancestral deities that reinforced tribal divisions. Furthermore, raids and plunder were vital for survival, and Islam legitimized these conquests under the concept of jihad while promoting state formation through the Ummah. Thus, Crone characterized early Islam as a nativist movement, reflecting the Arabian way of life and resistance to foreign influences, particularly the Byzantine and Persian empires. While Crone disagreed with Watt's emphasis on trade, she concurred that the settlement of some tribes necessitated the development of political structures, weakening tribal ties.

7.4.3 Revisionist Theory

In 2015, historian Fred Donner reviewed the revisionist scholarship surrounding the origins of Islam. He highlighted that Peter Brown's influential book, *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), transformed the field by integrating early Islamic history into the broader context of Late Antiquity, encouraging historians to adopt a more holistic perspective.

Donner noted a renewed focus on documentary evidence, including the study of seals, coins, and Arabic papyrology, especially during the 1980s and the early 21st century. Extensive archaeological research in regions like Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Israel, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, and Yemen further enriched historical understanding. Earlier assumptions that Islam's rise coincided with an economic collapse were

challenged by scholars like Donald Whitcomb and Alan Malmsey, who argued that many regions in the Levant thrived during the 7th and 8th centuries. Peter Pentz described the rise of Islam as an "invisible conquest", emphasizing the gradual and peaceful transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule across most sites. The revisionist approach encouraged re-examining traditional narratives, resulting in diverse interpretations. Some scholars even suggested that Islam evolved as a form of Christianity or questioned the historical existence of Prophet Muhammad. However, these extreme views lacked substantial evidence and were often dismissed as speculative.

In conclusion, the Meccan Trade Hypothesis, Nativist Theory, and Revisionist Perspective provide diverse explanations for the rise of Islam, each shaped by historical interpretations, archaeological findings, and documentary analysis.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q.1 Who propounded the Meccan Trade Hypothesis pertaining to the rise of Islam?

Q.2 Name the historian who gave the Nativist Theory of rise of Islam?

Q.3 Name any one revisionist historian of the rise of Islam.

Q.4 Which historian opined that the rise of Islam, rather than being seen as an episode of violent destruction and discontinuity was an 'invisible conquest'?

7.5 Summary

- The rise of Islam marked a transformative event in the Arabian Peninsula, with significant global implications.
- Muhammad, belonging to the Quraysh tribe, emerged as the Prophet of Islam, uniting the fragmented Arabian tribes under a single political and religious framework.
- He emphasized five core religious duties, known as the Five Pillars of Islam: the Declaration of Faith (Shahada), Daily Prayers (Salat), Almsgiving (Zakat), Fasting (Saum), and the Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj).

- In addition to these practices, Islam is rooted in Six Articles of Faith: Monotheism (Tawhid), Belief in Angels, Prophets and Messengers, Holy Books, the Day of Judgment, and Predestination.
- Historians have debated the factors behind Islam's rapid spread. W.M. Watt, Maxime Rodinson, and Marshal Hodgson proposed the Meccan Trade Hypothesis, arguing that expanding trade led to economic disparities in Mecca. Muhammad's vision of an egalitarian ummah addressed these social tensions, facilitating Islam's growth and state formation.
- However, Patricia Crone challenged this view, contending that Meccan trade involved low-value goods, insufficient to cause significant social inequality.
- Crone's Nativist Theory attributed Islam's success to the Prophet's ability to unify Arab tribes under a shared cultural identity rather than economic factors.
- Fred Donner further expanded the understanding of early Islam by situating its origins within the context of Late Antiquity. His research, along with archaeological findings, offered fresh perspectives and challenged traditional narratives.

7.6 Glossary

Hadis/Hadith: A narrative record of the sayings or customs of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

Khutba: A sermon preached by an imam in a mosque at the time of the Friday noon prayer

Qiblah: It is the direction that Muslims face when they make prayer or salat. This would be towards the Kaaba.

Ramadan: The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, during which fasting is required from just before dawn until sunset.

Trance: A sleeplike state usually characterized by partly suspended animation with diminished or absent sensory and motor activity.

Ummah: It refers to the entire Muslim community.

7.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Prophet Muhammad was born in 570 CE in Mecca.

Ans.2 Quraysh tribe

Ans.3 The "Hijrah", also Hijrat or Hegira, is the migration or journey of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina. It is the beginning of the Islamic calendar and was determined to be July 16, 622 CE.

Ans.4 624 CE

Ans.5 632 CE

Ans.6 A small stone building in the court of the Great Mosque at Mecca that contains a sacred black stone. It is the goal of hajj and the point toward which Muslims turn in praying.

Ans.7 Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib and Isha.

Ans.8 It is an Islamic term referring to the obligation that an individual has to donate a certain proportion of wealth each year to charitable causes.

Ans.9 In Islam, any religious fast, but especially the fast of the month of Ramadan is called as Saum. Its purpose is to practice self-restraint, piety, and generosity.

Ans.10 According to the Quran, on the Day of Judgment this entire universe will come to an end. Then the dead will be resurrected and accounts taken of their deeds.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 W.M Watt

Ans.2 Patricia Crone

Ans.3 Fred Donner

Ans.4 Peter Pentz

7.8 Suggested Readings

1. Abdalaatil, Hammudah, Islam in Focus, Delhi: Crescent Publishing Company, 1988.
2. Ahmad, Khurshid, ed, Islam: Its Meaning and Message, Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, 1980.
3. Cragg, Kenneth, The House of Islam, Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, 1975.
4. Crone, Patricia, Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
5. Fazlur, Rahman, Islam, Chicago: University Press, 1979.
6. Geijbels, M, An Introduction to Islam, Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1977.
7. Khirshid, Ahmad, Islam, Its Meaning and its Message, New Delhi, 1977.
8. Lapidus, Ira M, A History of Islamic Societies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), Second Edition, 2002.
9. Rodinson, Maxime, Mohammed, New York: New Press, 1961.

7.9 Terminal Questions

1. Write a detailed essay on the life of Prophet Muhammad.
2. Describe the rise of Prophet Muhammad to power.
3. Explain the key teachings of Prophet Muhammad.
4. Analyze the factors that contributed to the growth of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula under Prophet Muhammad's leadership.
5. Discuss the causes behind the origin of Islam, with a focus on the historiographical perspectives.
6. Summarize the main points of the Meccan Trade Hypothesis.
7. What arguments do proponents of the Nativist Theory present regarding the origin of Islam?
8. Explain the perspectives of revisionist historians on the origin of Islam.

UNIT- 8

EVOLUTION OF THE ISLAMIC STATE—I

Structure

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objectives

8.3 Rule of the First Four Caliphs

8.3.1 Abu Bakr (632-634 CE)

8.3.2 Umar (634-644 CE)

8.3.3 Usman (644-656 CE)

8.3.4 Ali (656-661 CE)

Self-Check Exercise-1

8.4 Summary

8.5 Glossary

8.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

8.7 Suggested Readings

8.8 Terminal Questions

8.1 Introduction

The death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE created both a political and religious void, posing a significant challenge to the newly established Arabian state. Since Muhammad had proclaimed himself as the final prophet in the lineage of divine messengers, including those of Judaism and Christianity, no one could claim the role of prophet after him. However, the Muslim community urgently needed a leader to govern the state and guide the religious community. The lack of clarity regarding succession risked fracturing the unity of Muslims. To address this, the institution of the Caliphate was established. The Caliph became the head of the Islamic state, combining political authority with religious leadership, as Islam did not have a separate priesthood.

8.2 Learning Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the origins and establishment of the Caliphate.

- Learn about the leadership of the first four Caliphs—Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali.

8.3 The Rule of the First Four Caliphs

Following the death of Prophet Muhammad, disagreements arose within the Muslim community regarding his political successor, as he had not appointed one. Three prominent groups claimed the right to succession:

1. **Muhajirun and Ansar:** The early supporters of Muhammad from Mecca and Medina believed their loyalty during the Hijra (622 CE) gave them the right to select the next leader.
2. **Alids (Legitimists):** This group argued that leadership should remain within Muhammad's family and supported Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, as the rightful successor.
3. **Umayyads:** As an influential faction from the Quraysh aristocracy, they also sought to influence the succession process.

After extensive deliberations, Abu Bakr, a close companion of Muhammad and father-in-law (through Aisha), was chosen as the first Caliph (Khalifa), serving as a leader of the Muslim community rather than a prophet. The first four Caliphs—Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali—are collectively known as the Rashidun or "Rightly Guided Caliphs" due to their close association with the Prophet.

8.3.1 Abu Bakr (632–634 CE)

The institution of the Caliphate emerged as an Islamic governance system based on the Quran and Sunnah, established after Muhammad's death to serve the ummah and uphold Shariah laws. Following the principles of **Shura** (council) and **Ijma** (consensus), Abu Bakr was elected as the first Caliph, a process that proceeded relatively smoothly due to his respected status among Muslims.

However, after Muhammad's death, the nascent Arabian state faced fragmentation as many Bedouin tribes, unfamiliar with formal state structures, withdrew their allegiance. Some leaders even declared themselves prophets, promoting their own interpretations of Islam. Labeled as "false prophets" by the Muslims of Mecca and Medina, Abu Bakr launched the **Ridda Wars** ("Wars of Apostasy") to restore unity, although many tribes he fought had never fully embraced Islam.

In **633 CE**, Abu Bakr's forces defeated a tribal confederation at **al-Aqraba**, securing control over eastern Arabia. This victory was crucial for preserving the Islamic state and strengthening the link between Islam and Arab identity. Another significant encounter was the **Battle of Ajnadayn** on **July 30, 634 CE**, where Muslim forces defeated the Byzantine Empire, marking the first instance of Arabs fighting as a unified army rather than as separate tribal raiding parties.

Abu Bakr's efforts to unify Arabia laid the groundwork for future conquests under **Umar**, including wars against the Byzantines and the Sassanids.

In **634 CE**, Abu Bakr fell ill and, after consulting his companions, appointed **Umar** as his successor—the first instance in Islamic history of a Caliph nominating his heir. Notably, Abu Bakr also refunded his entire state allowance before his death, highlighting his integrity and dedication.

8.3.2 Umar (634-644 CE)

After Abu Bakr's demise, Umar, one of the earliest converts from Mecca, was appointed as the second Caliph. Known as Al-Faruq (The One Who Distinguishes Right from Wrong), Umar earned immense respect for his leadership and governance. During his decade-long rule, he significantly expanded the Arab empire, completing the unification of Arabia and extending control over Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt.

The rapid Arab conquests were facilitated by the prolonged conflict between the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires, which left both exhausted. When the Arabs began their invasions in 633–634 CE, neither empire could mount an effective defense. In

Syria, Damascus was besieged in 634 CE and fell by 636 CE. Within two years, Iraq was under Arab control, and the Byzantines were driven out of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. Military leaders like Saad ibn Abi Waqqas and Khalid ibn al-Walid played pivotal roles in these campaigns.

A significant turning point occurred in 636 CE, when the Arabs defeated a major Sassanid army and captured Hira, the Lakhmid capital under Sassanid control. The Battle of Qadisiyah in 637 CE further weakened the Sassanids, culminating in the fall of Ctesiphon (known as Madain by the Arabs). The last Sassanid emperor, Yazdagird III, fled and sought refuge with Turkish princes. The capture of Ctesiphon brought immense wealth to the Arabs and marked the end of Sassanid rule in Iraq. In 638 CE, the Arabs took control of Jerusalem, followed by the conquest of Egypt, culminating with Alexandria's fall in 642 CE. This secured Egypt, a vital region due to its strategic location, naval facilities, and role as the granary of the Eastern Roman Empire.

To the east, the Arabs pushed into Iran after 642 CE, as the Sassanids retreated beyond the Zagros Mountains. The Battle of Nahavand in 642 CE destroyed the main Sassanid army. By 650 CE, the Arabs controlled all of Iran, including Khurasan, where Yazdagird III was killed in 651 CE. By the mid-7th century, the Arab empire stretched across the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, parts of North Africa, Iraq, and Iran.

Historians attribute this rapid expansion to multiple factors. Ira M. Lapidus highlights how local populations, disillusioned with their former rulers, accepted Arab rule. G.E. von Grunebaum emphasizes the Arabs' efficient use of camels and horses, enabling swift military movements.

8.3.3 Uthman (644–656 CE)

Following Umar's death, a six-member council was formed to select the next Caliph, with the condition that none could nominate themselves. The council ultimately chose Uthman, a member of the Umayyad clan and one of the early muhajirun. Once in power, Uthman favored the Umayyads and other prominent Meccan families, reversing

Umar's policies that prioritized the original supporters of Islam—the muhajirun and ansar. This favoritism became evident through key appointments and the redistribution of conquered territories' revenues in favor of the Umayyads. Uthman also tightened control over provincial finances and demanded detailed records of lands previously owned by Persian rulers.

In religious matters, Uthman aimed to consolidate authority by standardizing the Quranic text to ensure unity. According to Ira M. Lapidus, Uthman's goal was to revive the pre-Islamic alliance of Meccan and Arabian tribal aristocracy while strengthening the Caliph's authority to implement social, economic, and religious reforms. This approach angered the Hashimites, Prophet Muhammad's clan, who viewed Uthman's favoritism as a betrayal of early Islamic principles.

While territorial expansion slowed after 650 CE, the complete conquest of Iran was achieved. Uthman introduced significant administrative changes in the conquered regions. In Mesopotamia and Syria, earlier agreements were disregarded, and taxes were based on population and resources rather than traditional tribute. The city-state system ended, with urban and rural areas unified under provincial administrations. In Iraq and Egypt, centralized bureaucracies were replaced by Arab-led administrations, while Sassanian crown lands were confiscated and added to the Caliphal domain. Egypt's administration was streamlined by dissolving independent estates and municipalities.

Uthman's rule marked the first major internal divisions within the Muslim community. His practice of appointing relatives to powerful positions empowered influential Meccan families, some of whom had opposed Muhammad. He also abandoned Umar's restrictions on Arab land ownership outside the Arabian Peninsula, allowing elite families to establish large estates. Unlike Umar, Uthman lacked strong administrative skills, leading to injustices, inefficiencies, and financial mismanagement.

These issues fueled opposition, particularly from Ali's supporters, who believed Ali should have succeeded Muhammad. Their discontent was rooted in both political

and religious idealism, as they viewed Uthman's favoritism as a betrayal of Islamic principles. Tensions grew among tribal groups, especially when pension payments became inconsistent. The unrest culminated in Uthman's assassination in 656 CE by a group of rebels from Fustat (modern Cairo).

8.3.4 Ali (656–661 CE)

Uthman's assassination triggered a succession crisis, plunging the Islamic Empire into civil war. Ali, supported by his followers in Medina and the Egyptian rebels involved in Uthman's murder, became the fourth Caliph. As Caliph, Ali rejected Uthman's centralized policies and advocated for an equitable distribution of resources among all Arabs.

Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, was among the earliest converts to Islam. His close relationship with the Prophet strengthened his claim to the Caliphate. However, his accession faced strong opposition. The Umayyads, led by Muawiya, governor of Syria and Uthman's cousin, were the first to challenge Ali's authority. Additionally, Aisha, Muhammad's widow, along with Zubayr, a prominent companion, accused Ali of failing to avenge Uthman's murder and openly rebelled against him.

The strongest opposition came from Muawiya, who commanded significant support among Syrian Arabs. To counter Muawiya's influence, Ali shifted his capital from Medina to Kufa in Iraq, where he had considerable backing. While most regions accepted Ali as Caliph, Syria remained under Muawiya's control. In 657 CE, the two forces clashed at the Battle of Siffin in northern Mesopotamia. The battle ended without a decisive victory, leading to arbitration. The resulting agreement allowed Muawiya to retain control of Syria while Ali governed the rest of the Islamic Empire from Kufa.

The Battle of Siffin deepened political and sectarian divisions within Islam. One faction, believing Ali was divinely chosen due to his familial ties to the Prophet and personal qualities, became known as the Shia (meaning "party" of Ali). They viewed Ali as infallible and the rightful successor to the Caliphate.

Another faction, the Kharijis (secessionists), emerged in opposition to the arbitration, viewing it as a betrayal of Islamic principles. Though Ali defeated the Kharijis militarily, their ideological opposition persisted. Gradually, support for Ali waned as tribal leaders in Kufa withdrew their backing. The Kharijis continued to disrupt the state for decades, promoting their own interpretations of Islam and influencing the development of Islamic theology.

A midst this turmoil, Muawiya's support grew, with many arguing that his disciplined administration and military strength could restore unity. In 661 CE, a Khariji assassin killed Ali. Following his death, Muawiya declared himself Caliph. Though an attempt was made to promote Ali's eldest son, Hasan, as his successor, the Shia lacked sufficient support.

The civil war preceding Ali's death resulted in a lasting schism within the Muslim community. Supporters of Muawiya's Caliphate became known as Sunni Muslims, while those who believed only Ali's descendants had a legitimate claim to leadership became Shia Muslims.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 What do you mean by the term Rashidun?
- Q.2 Who was the first Muslim Caliph?
- Q.3 What was Ridda?
- Q.4 When was the Battle of Ajnadayn fought?
- Q.5 Which Caliph was known as Al-Siddiq (The Truthful)?
- Q.6 When was the Battle of Qadisiya fought?
- Q.7 Who started the hijri era?
- Q.8 Who was the third Caliph in Islam?
- Q.9 Who was the last Rashidun Caliph?
- Q.10 How long did the first Caliphate last?
- Q.11 Why did Islam split into Sunni and Shia?

8.4 Summary

- After the death of Prophet Muhammad, a succession dispute arose among the early supporters of Muhammad (Muhajirun and Ansar), the Alids (legitimists), and the Umayyads.
- Following extensive discussions, Abu Bakr (632–634 CE) was chosen as the first Caliph (successor) of Muhammad. He, along with the next three Caliphs—Umar, Usman, and Ali—are collectively known as the Rashidun.
- During Abu Bakr's Caliphate, the Muslim community faced threats of fragmentation as some tribal chiefs claimed prophethood. To suppress them, Abu Bakr launched the Ridda wars.
- Under Abu Bakr's leadership, the Muslim community engaged in its first unified battle against the Byzantines, moving beyond tribal units.
- After Abu Bakr, Umar (634–644 CE) succeeded him and is recognized as the architect of the Arab Empire. During his reign, the Arabian Peninsula was unified, and Arab conquests in the Middle East commenced.
- By 643 CE, the Arabs had conquered Syria, Egypt, and parts of North Africa, while Iraq and Iran fell after the defeat of the Sassanids.
- The Arabs' success is attributed to their effective use of camels, skilled archers, the concept of jihad, and the acceptance they received from the local populations.
- Umar transformed Arab tribal forces into an elite army and established garrisons (amsar) in Basra, Kufa, and Fustat to settle Arabs and prevent Bedouin raids.
- Following Muhammad's policy, Umar did not impose Islam on the conquered people but instead levied a tribute known as jizya.
- Local administrations remained intact, and the existing elites retained their tax-collecting authority. Umar adopted the title Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful).
- He also standardized prayer practices in mosques and initiated the compilation of the Quran. His favoritism toward the Meccan and Medinese supporters of Muhammad angered the Meccan elite, leading to his assassination in 644 CE.
- Umar was succeeded by Usman (644–656 CE), an Umayyad. Usman reversed many of Umar's policies by favoring the Meccans over Muhammad's early supporters.

- Usman's reign saw limited territorial expansion but emphasized regular taxation instead of tributes. He also formalized the taxation system and standardized the Quran.
- Growing opposition from the Hashimites eventually led to Usman's assassination in 656 CE.
- After another succession struggle, Ali (656–661 CE) became Caliph with support from the Ansaris and Egyptian rebels.
- Ali opposed centralization and advocated for equal distribution of tax revenues among Arabs.
- His accession faced resistance from several factions, sparking civil war within Arabia. The conflict between Ali's supporters (Shia) and the Umayyads marked the beginning of the Shia-Sunni divide.
- Muawiya emerged as Ali's most determined opponent, leading to the Battle of Siffin.
- Ali's withdrawal led to the rise of the Kharijites, who later assassinated him in 661 CE, marking the end of the Rashidun Caliphate.

8.5 Glossary

Jihad: Literally means "struggle." It refers to any sincere effort made in the path of God, whether personal, physical, or moral, aimed at promoting righteousness and resisting wrongdoing.

Jizya: A per capita annual tax historically imposed on non-Muslim subjects (dhimmis) under Islamic rule.

Kharaj: The kharaj was a land tax that was originally paid only by non-Muslims.

Sunnah: In Islam, Sunnah is the traditions and practices of Prophet Muhammad, that constitute a model for Muslims to follow.

Shariat: The body of canonical law based on the Quran that lays down certain duties and penalties for Muslims.

Zimmi: A non-Muslim subject of a state governed according to the sharia who is granted

the freedom to worship and is entitled to the protection of life and property by the state.

8.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 The Rashidun Caliphs or 'rightly guided' or 'pious Caliphs' often simply called the Rashidun, are the first four Caliphs—Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali—who led the Muslim community following the death of the Islamic Prophet.

Ans.2 Abu Bakr

Ans.3 The Ridda Wars ('Apostasy Wars' or 'Rebellion Wars') were a series of military campaigns launched by the Caliph Abu Bakr against the rebel Arabian tribes during 632 and 633 CE, just after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

Ans.4 July 30, 634 CE.

Ans.5 Umar

Ans.6 637 CE

Ans.7 The second Caliph Umar.

Ans.8 Usman

Ans.9 Ali

Ans.10 The time period under the leadership of the Four Caliphs is called the Rashidun Caliphate which lasted for 30 years from 632 CE to 661 CE.

Ans.11 After Prophet Muhammad death in 632 CE, a group of Muslims believed that Muhammad's successor should be Abu Bakr. They were known as Sunni. However, a second group of Muslims, who came to be known as the Shia, believed that his successor should have been Ali.

8.7 Suggested Readings

1. Berkey, Jonathan P, The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East (600-1800), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
2. Goitein, S.D, Studies in Islamic History and Institutions, Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1968.
3. Hoyland, Robert G, In God's Path: the Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire, Oxford University Press, 2015.
4. Sonn, Tamara, A Brief History of Islam, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
5. Von Grunebaum, G.E, Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

8.8 Terminal Questions

1. Who were the Rashidun Caliphs? Analyze the factors that led to expansion of the Arab Empire under Islam.
2. What is the most important contribution of the Rashidun Caliphate? Explain.
3. Write a short note on the first Muslim Caliph Abu Bakr.
4. How Umar consolidated the Islamic state?
5. Discuss the achievements of Usman.
6. Give a brief account of the period of Caliphate of Ali.

UNIT-9

EVOLUTION OF THE ISLAMIC STATE—II

Structure

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Objectives

9.3 The Umayyad Caliphate

9.3.1 Muawiya and Dynastic Rule

9.3.2 The Decline of the Umayyad's

Self-Check Exercise-1

9.4 Summary

9.5 Glossary

9.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

9.7 Suggested Readings

9.8 Terminal Questions

9.1 Introduction

Muawiya I, a member of the Umayyad clan of the Quraysh tribe, founded the Umayyad dynasty (661–750 CE), establishing Damascus (Syria) as its capital. His rise to power marked the beginning of monarchical rule under Islamic principles. To avoid future succession conflicts, Muawiya appointed his son Yazid as his successor, transforming the Islamic state from a Caliphate to a hereditary kingship (Mulk). Muawiya ruled from 661 to 680 CE, and all subsequent Caliphs belonged to the Umayyad family. Thus, the period from 661 to 750 CE is known as the era of the Umayyad Caliphate.

9.2 Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand Muawiya's rise and the establishment of dynastic rule.
- Identify the key factors that contributed to the decline of the Umayyad Caliphate.

9.3 The Umayyad Caliphate

Many historians view the Umayyad Caliphate as a departure from the original Islamic ideals of a theocratic community, replacing them with secular monarchical rule. Muawiya is often criticized for abandoning the Islamic principles of governance by establishing a hereditary Arab dynasty. However, there was no fixed doctrine regarding the Caliphate at the time. The first three Caliphs were chosen through different methods, with their legitimacy depending on the acceptance of influential families in Medina and the broader Muslim community. Notably, the first four Caliphs all belonged to the Quraysh tribe.

To maintain unity across the rapidly expanding empire, strong centralized control was necessary. The political stability provided by the Umayyads enabled Muslims to focus on exploring the deeper meanings of the Quran. This stability under Umayyad rule played a crucial role in the continued spread of Islam.

9.3.1 Muawiya and Dynastic Rule

Muawiya proclaimed himself Caliph in Damascus and ruled from 661 to 680 CE. He restored centralized authority, which had been firmly established during Umar's Caliphate but had weakened under Ali's reign. Unlike previous Caliphs, Muawiya did not depend on the approval of Mecca and Medina. Instead, he relied on his powerful Syrian army and substantial revenues to consolidate his rule. The Arab tribes supported him, fearing that political instability could lead to chaos and division. To maintain unity, Muawiya harshly suppressed political opposition.

During his rule, Khurasan was reconquered, and new garrison towns were founded to maintain the distinct identity of the Arab ruling class. Muslim forces expanded into eastern Iran and the Oxus Valley, although an attempt to besiege Constantinople was unsuccessful. To appease Arab tribal chiefs, Muawiya launched military campaigns into North Africa and eastern Iran. As an efficient administrator, he continued the policy of discouraging mass conversions to Islam.

Although Muawiya ruled as an absolute monarch, the concept of kingship remained unpopular among Arabs. Therefore, Muslim rulers continued to use the title

Caliph, emphasizing their role as the Prophet's representatives. To avoid future succession disputes, Muawiya introduced hereditary rule by nominating his son Yazid as his successor.

After Muawiya's death, Yazid (680–683 CE) assumed the Caliphate but faced significant opposition. The Shiites, Kharijis, and influential Muslim families from Mecca and Medina rejected hereditary succession. Supporters of Ali, particularly the Shiites in Kufa, declared Ali's younger son, Husayn—following the death of Hasan in 669 CE—and the Prophet's grandson, as the rightful Caliph.

Despite their efforts, Husayn's supporters could only muster a small force to resist the Umayyads. In 680 CE, the two sides clashed at the Battle of Karbala in present-day Iraq. Husayn's forces were decisively defeated, and he, along with his followers, was killed. His martyrdom elevated him to a symbol of resistance against tyranny. Today, his shrine in Karbala is a significant pilgrimage site for Shia Muslims. The event is commemorated annually during the Islamic month of Muharram, a period of mourning marking the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala.



Muharram Procession

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Muharram#/media/File:Grief_of_yore_and_gore-Muharram_procession_in_Hyderabad._01.jpg

The killing of a relative of the Prophet had a profound emotional impact. Alongside the Shiites and the Kharijis, several groups in Medina rose in rebellion. Yazid barely had time to consolidate his rule. Abdullah Ibn Zubayr, a Meccan aspirant, gained support in Arabia and Kufa, emerging as the leader of the opposition against Yazid. In 684 CE, he proclaimed himself Caliph with Medina as his capital. However, his authority remained limited, as multiple dissident groups were active.

One such group was the Kharijites, who briefly established an egalitarian and puritanical rule in central Arabia in 684 CE. Meanwhile, the supporters of Ali (Shiites) in Kufah promoted equality for non-Arab Muslim converts (mawali) in the distribution of war spoils. Abdullah Ibn Zubayr eventually suppressed this regime. His influence extended beyond Arabia to include Egypt and Iraq. At the same time, the Berbers of North Africa rebelled against the Umayyads.

According to Jonathan Berkey, these developments highlighted two significant points. First, Islam at the time remained closely tied to Arab identities, with rival factions contesting which Quraysh family had the right to lead the Muslim community. Second, with multiple contenders for the title of "Commander of the Faithful" across Syria, Iraq, and Arabia, it became difficult to consider the Muslim world as a unified polity.

Eventually, leadership within the Umayyad dynasty passed to another branch of the family. Marwan, a cousin of Muawiya, ruled from 683 to 685 CE, followed by his son Abd al-Malik (685–705 CE). Abd al-Malik defeated the Medina-based opposition, during which the Kaaba was damaged. He later oversaw its restoration, reinforced the Caliphate, and expanded the empire's borders. To strengthen his administration, he appointed Al-Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf as governor of Iraq and the eastern provinces. Al-Hajjaj invested heavily in irrigation projects in the Sawad region of Iraq and promoted economic growth while maintaining strict control. He ruled with an iron hand until his death in 714 CE.

Under Abd al-Malik, the Caliphate transitioned into an absolute monarchy. Political and military power became concentrated within a small ruling elite led by the

Caliph himself. To streamline governance, Abd al-Malik established a bureaucratic structure. A standing army replaced the earlier tribal militias, with traditional tribal leaders (rais al-qabila) being replaced by professional commanders (qaids). This transformation aimed to weaken tribal loyalties and create a more disciplined military force.

Several practices inherited from the Byzantine and Sassanid administrations were abandoned. Abd al-Malik vigorously pursued a policy of Arabization, replacing Greek and Persian (Pahlavi) with Arabic as the official administrative language. He also enforced uniformity in Quranic recitation. A significant innovation during his reign was the introduction of distinctive Islamic coinage. These new coins, inscribed with Quranic verses in Arabic, bore no portraits, emphasizing Islamic values.

Abd al-Malik's rule also witnessed extensive construction projects. Numerous mosques and palaces were built across the empire, with the Dome of the Rock, constructed in 692 CE near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, being the most notable. This iconic structure, built on the site of an ancient Hebrew temple, introduced a new architectural style that became a hallmark of Islamic architecture.

To resolve disputes within the community, Abd al-Malik appointed judges (qazis) in major garrison towns. Despite these developments, Islam continued to be perceived primarily as an Arab religion, and the conversion of non-Arabs was actively discouraged.



Dome of the Rock

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Dome_of_the_Rock#/media/File:Dome_of_the_rock-.jpg

The Rise and Expansion of the Umayyad Empire

After Abd al-Malik's reign, Al-Walid (705–715 CE) ascended the throne and initiated a new phase of territorial expansion. He reclaimed regions lost during previous civil wars and achieved significant conquests in northern Africa and the western Mediterranean. Egypt served as a base for campaigns targeting the western parts of northern Africa. The Arabs referred to the entire region stretching from Egypt's western borders to the Atlantic coast as Maghrib, encompassing modern-day Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

Arab incursions into the Maghrib began in the latter half of the 7th century, culminating in their control over the Roman province of Africa, known as Ifriqiya, by century's end. Qayrawan, established in 670 CE, became the primary Arab garrison town and the first urban center in the Maghrib. By the early 8th century, the entire Maghrib fell under Umayyad rule, with several Berber tribes converting to Islam and adopting Arab culture.

The Umayyad expansion extended westward into Europe, where they displaced the Visigoths from Spain in 711 CE, integrating the region into the Arab empire.

However, their advance was halted by the Franks. In the east, the Umayyads pushed into Sindh, where many Buddhist merchants embraced Islam. Their reach extended into Central Asia, eventually sharing a border with China. By the mid-8th century, the Umayyad Empire spanned the Near East, Egypt, North Africa, and parts of the Mediterranean.

The Umayyad Power Structure

The strength of the Umayyads primarily relied on Syrian support. The agricultural surplus from Syria enabled them to consolidate power. In the Marwanid region, the fertile lands between the Tigris and Euphrates in southern Iraq further contributed to the empire's economy. Al-Hajjaj, the provincial governor of southern Iraq, prioritized irrigation improvements to boost agricultural productivity.

During this period, the Umayyads successfully established administrative and political unity. Arabs transitioned from an occupying force to a ruling elite. The centralized Caliphal state controlled the empire's economic resources, sidelining the aristocrats of former regimes. The Umayyads introduced a more equitable taxation system, which was generally well-received.

To enforce tax policies, they implemented the *jizya*, a poll tax imposed on non-Muslims. Although earlier regimes exempted powerful elites, the Umayyads only exempted Arabs. Non-Arabs could avoid the tax by converting to Islam and affiliating with an Arab tribe as *mawali* (clients). However, the *mawali* held an inferior social status. Historian Patricia Crone suggests that many early *mawali* were war captives turned slaves, who, upon conversion, were accorded low social standing.

Despite their lower status, numerous *mawali* found roles in the administration, military, and government. This increased their integration and led them to demand equal rights and privileges with the original Muslim community. Meanwhile, non-Muslims were classified as *dhimmi*s, who paid *jizya* but were exempt from military service.

Decline of the Umayyad Caliphate

As the economic needs of the state grew, the burden on the peasantry intensified, leading to widespread discontent. The rise of absentee landlords and intermediaries between producers and the state further complicated the situation. Initially, the separation of Arab populations in garrison towns strengthened Umayyad control. However, as non-Arabs migrated to urban centers and converted to Islam, distinctions between Arabs and non-Arabs gradually faded.

The military character of garrison towns diminished as they transformed into thriving commercial hubs. Trade became as profitable as war booty, reducing the incentive for further conquests. Consequently, the conquering Arabs transitioned into civilian life and began facing the same socioeconomic challenges as other urban populations. Garrison towns, once symbols of segregation, evolved into centers of cultural and economic integration.

With the decline of military strength, the administration of distant provinces became increasingly difficult. To maintain order, some commanders established autonomous power in their regions. Meanwhile, the growing number of converts, or mawali, led to increased tensions, as they were treated as second-class citizens. Opposition groups capitalized on this discontent.

During Al-Walid's reign, religious criticism of the Umayyads intensified, particularly from Arabian Muslims. Critics condemned the luxurious lifestyles adopted by the Arab elite, reminiscent of former Byzantine rulers, arguing that such practices contradicted Islamic ideals.

Reforms and Further Decline

Under Sulayman (715–717 CE), tribal conflicts worsened as he favored the Syrian faction, alienating eastern territories like Iran. This exclusion fueled opposition, particularly among the Shia, the Umayyads' most vocal critics. Shia communities, concentrated in Iraq, continued to resist Umayyad rule, driven by resentment stemming from earlier crackdowns under Abd al-Malik's lieutenant, Al-Hajjaj.

The reign of Umar II (717–720 CE) marked an era of reform and attempted reconciliation. A pragmatic ruler, Umar II promoted unity by granting equal status to Arabs and non-Arabs. His tax reforms exempted Arab converts from the jizya and introduced the sadaqat, a charitable tax imposed on all Muslims. However, his successors oscillated between tax concessions and reversals, fueling instability and triggering a third civil war among Muslims.

Umar II's administration faced severe resource constraints. His failed attempt to capture Constantinople resulted in significant losses of wealth, manpower, and prestige. To ease tensions, he restored privileges to Medina's elite, reconciled with the Shia and Kharijites, exempted Egyptian Church lands from taxation, and abolished excessive taxes. He appointed honest officials and granted provinces more control over their revenues.

Umar II also reversed previous policies by encouraging dhimmis (non-Muslims) to convert, thus expanding the governing class. However, this strained state finances. Previously, Arabs paid a one-tenth tithe on their land, while non-Muslims paid the higher kharaj tax. As more people converted, state revenue declined. Umar II introduced a compromise: lands acquired by Muslims or owned by converts after 100 AH (Hijri) remained subject to kharaj.

Final Phase and Collapse

Following Umar II's death, Yazid II (720–724 CE) assumed power, succeeded by Hisham (724–743 CE), who temporarily restored stability through strict fiscal policies and increased taxation. However, his autocratic rule fueled resentment, particularly in Iraq, where Shia uprisings were brutally suppressed.

To secure resources, the Umayyads resumed expansion efforts. In 738 CE, Abd al-Rahman, the governor of Spain, advanced as far as Bordeaux, nearly reaching Paris. However, the Berbers, who had supplied manpower for these campaigns, revolted between 734 and 742 CE, halting further expansion.

The final years of Umayyad rule were marked by weak and corrupt leadership. Al-Walid II (743–744 CE), notorious for his extravagant lifestyle, relied on tribal rivalries to maintain power but was eventually assassinated. His successor, Yazid III, ruled for just one year before factional conflicts intensified. Financial troubles worsened as Umayyad governors imposed illegal taxes, further undermining central authority.

The last Umayyad Caliph, Marwan II (744–750 CE), assumed power at the age of sixty. His reign was marked by widespread unrest. Rebellions erupted in Syria, while the Kharijites revolted in Iraq. Shia activists capitalized on the instability, particularly in Khurasan, where Arab troops had integrated with the local population rather than remaining isolated in garrison towns.

In Khurasan, the Umayyads had co-opted former feudal lords (dihqans) as allies rather than displacing them. This alliance between peasants, Arabs, and dihqans created fertile ground for opposition movements. Ultimately, internal rebellions, economic strain, and social unrest culminated in the fall of the Umayyad dynasty.

The Abbasid Revolution

By the 740s, an organized movement aimed at overthrowing the Umayyads emerged. Led by the Hashimites, this movement operated in secrecy, mobilizing opposition forces. The Abbasids, a branch of the Hashimites descended from Al-Abbas, the Prophet Muhammad's paternal uncle, provided ideological leadership. According to historian Ira M. Lapidus, the Abbasid movement was reinforced by both Arabized Persians and Persianized Arabs united by loyalty to the Prophet's family.

The Umayyad rule officially ended in 750 CE, when the Khurasani army, led by Abu Muslim, played a decisive role in their downfall. Marwan II fled to Egypt, where he was eventually killed. This marked the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate, with Abul Abbas al-Saffah (al-Saffah meaning "the avenger") proclaimed as the new Caliph in 750 CE.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 Who established the Umayyad dynasty?
- Q.2 What was the duration of Umayyad Caliphate?
- Q.3 When and between whom was the Battle of Karbala fought?
- Q.4 What is Muharram celebrated for?
- Q.5 What do understand by the term mawali?
- Q.6 Under the reign of which Caliph, the Caliphate became an absolute monarchy?
- Q.7 In which country is the Dome of the Rock located?
- Q.8 What was Maghrib?
- Q.9 Name the main garrison town of the Arabs in Ifriqiya.
- Q.10 When the Umayyad armies did invaded Western Europe?
- Q.11 Which Caliph imposed a Muslim alms tax called sadaqat on all Muslims?
- Q.12 Who was the last ruler of the Umayyads?

9.4 Summary

- The Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE) marked a new era in the development of Islam and the Arab Empire.
- Mecca and Medina lost their importance as the politico-religious centre of Islam and were replaced by Syria.
- Accession of Muawiya further deepened the differences between Shias, who believed only someone from the family of Ali had the right to become Caliph and the Sunnis who supported Muawiya.
- This period also marked the beginning of monarchical system in Islam. Succession of Muawiya's son, Yazid, at the position of Caliph led to another round of civil war which resulted in the famous Battle of Karbala (680 CE) where the Shiite forces led by Husayn were defeated and Husayn was killed.
- Marwand family rebuilt the Umayyad Caliphate. The reign of Abd al-Malik and Al-Wahid stabilised the Umayyad rule by introducing many changes in the Islamic polity.
- Caliphate was turned into an absolute monarchy. Administration became more bureaucratised and the tribal contingents were replaced by a professional army.

- Arabisation of the administration was achieved by making Arabic as the language of administration. Greek and Persian speaking officials were replaced by Arabic speaking ones to introduce organizational identity.
- A new courtly culture developed which witnessed the prominence of scribes, court chamberlain and officials of the chancery.
- The introduction of coins with Arabic script inscribed on it and construction of building such as the 'Dome of Rock' at Jerusalem on the site of an ancient Hebrew temple were attempts to demonstrate the victory of Islam.
- This was followed by the construction of several mosques and palaces at Medina and Damascus.
- The economic requirements of the state continued to grow. The pressure on the peasantry also increased. Tensions appeared as the Arabs conquered lands and there was rise of absentee landlords and rural intermediaries between the producers and the state.
- The increasing number of conversions had severe repercussions. Conversion of non-Muslims remained a slow process due to the application of the condition of becoming a client (mawali) to the Muslim Arab. However, the mawali were given a subordinate status among the Muslim community.
- But the existence of large number of mawali in the Arab administration and the army brought about an end to the Arab exclusivism, and the former started demanding equal status and privileges as that of the ummah.
- Militarily, this period was marked by resumption of the policy of conquest which was backed by imperialistic ambitions. By the first decade of the eighth century, large parts of North African region (called Maghrib), besides Spain in the Mediterranean, were brought under the control of the Arabs.
- The Umayyads were opposed by the Sunnis, who were opposed to the Caliph for assuming religious authority through political power, and the Shias, who continued to hold on to the idea of Caliphate going to the family of Ali.
- However, the biggest opposition to the Umayyads came from the Hashimites headed by the Abbasids. The Abbasids started their movement in a clandestine manner to overthrow the Umayyads.

- The excessive use of Syrian army to control the Arabs had sapped its vitality. They were gradually expelled from Transoxiana, Anatolia and Central France.
- The Umayyad rule came to an end in 749-50 CE and it was replaced by the Abbasids.
- By means of a propaganda campaign the Abbasids won the support of the elites of Khurasan. They were supported by many groups, including Yemenis, their agents at Kufa, Persian and Arabian elite.
- The Umayyad rule came to an end in 749-50 CE and it was replaced by the Abbasids.

9.5 Glossary

Garrison: A group of soldiers living in or defending a town or building, or the buildings that the soldiers live in.

Kharaj: A type of individual Islamic tax on agricultural land and its produce developed under the Islamic law.

Zakat: Almsgiving. It amounted to 2.5 per cent of the total income.

Zimmis: These were those Jews and Christians who used to live under Muslim rule. They paid a tax called Jizya and gained the right to be protected by Muslim rulers.

9.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Muawiyah I

Ans.2 662 to 750 CE

Ans.3 The Battle of Karbala was fought in 680 CE between Husayn's forces and Umayyads.

Ans.4 Muharram is celebrated as the advent of the Islamic New Year. It is considered as a pious and important festival by the Muslims. It also marks the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala, where Prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn was killed.

Ans.5 Mawali is the Arabic name for people all over the Islamic Empire who were not Arab but converted to Islam anyway.

Ans.6 Abd al Malik

Ans.7 Jerusalem

Ans.8 The entire stretch of northern Africa, from the western borders of Egypt to the Atlantic coast was called as 'the Maghrib' by the Arabs. It comprises present-day Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

Ans.9 Qayrawan

Ans.10 711 CE

Ans.11 Umar II

Ans.12 Marwan II

9.7 Suggested Readings

1. Crone, Patricia and Hinds, Martin, God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
2. Esposito, John L, The Oxford History of Islam, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
3. Flood, Finbarr Barry and Necipoolu, Gulru, A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2017.
4. Frye, Richard Nelson, The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 4, From the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
5. Hawting, G. R., The First Dynasty of Islam—The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750, London: Routledge, 2002.
6. Lapidus, Ira M, A History of Islamic Societies, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

9.8 Terminal Questions

1. How Umayyads succeeded in establishing centralized rule?
2. Describe the growth and expansion of Islamic Empire under the Umayyads.
3. Write short note on the conflict between Husayn and Umayyads.
4. Discuss the achievements of Umayyad Caliph Abd al Malik.
5. Analyze the factors responsible for the decline of the Umayyad dynasty.

UNIT-10

EVOLUTION OF THE ISLAMIC STATE—III

Structure

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Objectives

10.3 The Abbasid Caliphate

10.3.1 The Abbasid Revolution

10.3.2 The Early Abbasids

10.3.3 Administration under Abbasids

10.3.4 Islamic Golden Age

10.3.5 Decline of Abbasids

Self-Check Exercise-1

10.4 Summary

10.5 Glossary

10.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

10.7 Suggested Readings

10.8 Terminal Questions

10.1 Introduction

The Abbasid Caliphate, which succeeded the Umayyad dynasty in 750 CE, was the second significant dynasty to govern the Muslim empire. While their dominance endured for nearly a century, their influence gradually declined, and by the 10th century, they largely held only symbolic authority. The Abbasid period is renowned as the golden age of Islamic culture, marking one of the most enduring and impactful Islamic dynasties. At its height, the Abbasid Empire was the largest in the world, engaging with distant civilizations like the Chinese and Indians in the East and the Byzantines in the West. These interactions facilitated the exchange and assimilation of diverse cultural ideas.

10.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the concept of the Abbasid Revolution,
- Explore the rule of the early Abbasid Caliphs,
- Gain insights into the Islamic Golden Age,
- Analyze the factors that led to the Abbasid decline.

10.3 The Abbasid Caliphate

The fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 750 CE paved the way for the rise of the Abbasid family, also of Meccan origin. The Abbasids distinguished themselves from the Umayyads by criticizing their governance and moral conduct. They gained significant support from the *mawali*, non-Arab Muslims who had been marginalized under Umayyad rule.

The Abbasids traced their lineage to Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib (566–653 CE), the youngest uncle of Prophet Muhammad, from whom the dynasty derived its name. Muhammad ibn Ali, Abbas's great-grandson, initiated a movement to restore power to the Prophet's family—the Hashimites—beginning in Persia during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph Umar II.

10.3.1 The Abbasid Revolution

The Abbasid rise to power is often referred to as the "Abbasid Revolution" in Islamic historiography. Historian Jonathan Porter Berkey asserts that this movement was a direct response to the religious unrest of the mid-8th century. Its success not only transformed the political landscape but also reshaped religious authority. Subsequent Abbasid rulers adapted to these new realities by formulating fresh justifications for their reign.

Berkey further contends that the Abbasid Revolution was not merely a coup where one ruling family supplanted another. Instead, it was ideologically driven, aiming to establish an ideal Muslim order linked to Prophet Muhammad. Despite receiving

support from some mawali of Iranian origin, the Abbasid movement primarily sought to restore Islamic principles rather than revive Iranian culture and identity.

The Abbasid Dynasty rose to power after overthrowing the Umayyad Dynasty, which had become increasingly unpopular. The Umayyads favored Syrian Arabs over other Muslims, while the mawali—non-Arab converts to Islam, primarily Persians—were treated as socially inferior. This discrimination fueled resentment among Eastern Arabs and Persians, prompting them to unite for rebellion. Many Muslims also opposed the Umayyads for transforming the Caliphate into a hereditary monarchy. While some believed power should not be monopolized by a single family, the Shiites argued that true authority belonged to the Prophet Muhammad's family through his son-in-law, Ali, which excluded the Umayyads from legitimate rule.

The Abbasids capitalized on this discontent, forming an alliance of Persian mawali, Eastern Arabs, and Shiites to revolt against the Umayyads in Persia. They gained Shiite support by claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his uncle Abbas, though not through Ali, as the Shiites would have preferred. Nonetheless, they were seen as a better alternative to the Umayyads.

Abu Muslim, a prominent Persian general backing the Abbasid cause, mobilized the Khurasani armies. His military successes enabled the Abbasid leader Abul Abbas al-Saffah to enter the Shiite-dominated city of Kufa in 748 CE and proclaim himself Caliph. In 750 CE, the combined forces of Abu Muslim and al-Saffah defeated the Umayyad Caliph Marwan II at the Battle of the Zab, near the Tigris River. Marwan II fled to Egypt but was eventually killed. Al-Saffah then captured Damascus and ordered the massacre of the remaining Umayyad family, except for Abd al-Rahman, who escaped to Spain and established the Umayyad rule there. With this victory, the Abbasids became the new rulers of the Caliphate, governing for nearly 500 years. The 'Abbasid Revolution' profoundly shaped Arab-Iranian-Islamic history.

10.3.2 The Early Abbasids

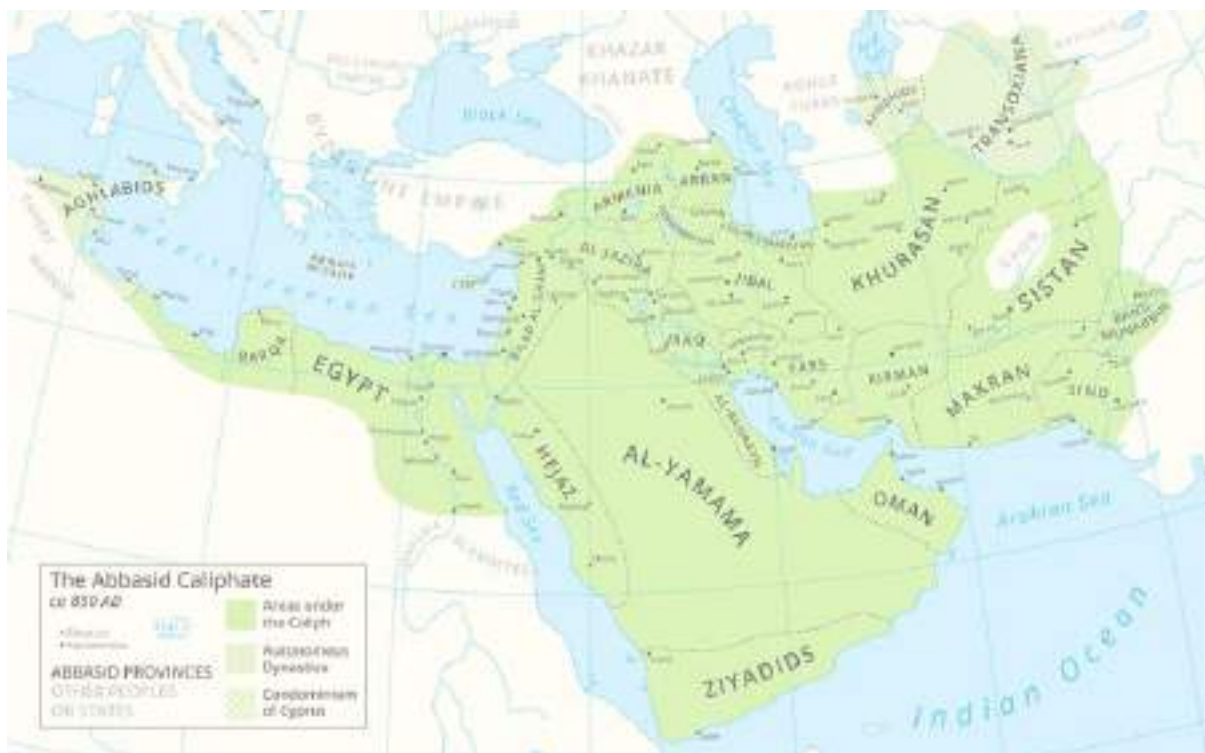
Although the Abbasids had led a revolution against the Umayyads' unpopular policies, those expecting significant reforms were soon disappointed. Al-Saffah died in 754 CE and was succeeded by his brother Al-Mansur (754–775 CE), regarded as the true architect of the Abbasid Caliphate. Under his rule, the Caliphate became even more autocratic than during the Marwanid era. The Abbasids' alliance with the Shiites proved temporary, as they soon embraced Sunni orthodoxy, asserting their family's authority over that of Ali's lineage while continuing the suppression of Shiites.

However, the Abbasids remained loyal to their Persian mawali allies. They adopted the Persian model of kingship, which merged spiritual and temporal authority to reinforce the Caliph's supremacy. The Abbasid court borrowed extensively from Persian traditions, elevating the Caliph to an almost divine status. The ruler became largely inaccessible to commoners, and court ceremonies involved elaborate rituals, such as prostration and kissing the ground before the Caliph. The grandeur of the Caliph's court in Baghdad further emphasized the ruler's majesty.

One of the Abbasids' most significant changes was relocating the empire's capital from the Umayyad stronghold of Damascus to a newly established city—Baghdad. Al-Mansur found existing Arabian cities inadequate for his vision, prompting him to build an impressive capital in southern Iraq. Founded in 762 CE along the Tigris River, Baghdad was designed as a circular city, symbolizing its status as the heart of the Islamic world. Fortified by multiple gates, it remained the seat of Abbasid power and evolved into one of the largest and most influential cities of the Middle Ages.

Strategically located near the former Persian capital of Ctesiphon, Baghdad's foundation carried symbolic significance. Many scholars suggest that Al-Mansur aimed to portray himself as a ruler in the tradition of the Sassanids and their Hellenistic predecessors. Historian Jonathan Berkey notes that the establishment of Baghdad also reflected the Abbasids' growing tension with the family of Ali, who held significant influence in Kufa, the Abbasids' initial capital.

Under Abbasid patronage, Baghdad flourished rapidly, becoming the largest city in the world. The Persian culture, once suppressed under the Umayyads, now thrived. Science, art, and poetry flourished, while advances in technology further accelerated cultural growth. The Abbasids also learned papermaking from Chinese prisoners of war. This innovation made paper affordable and durable, revolutionizing the spread of knowledge and literature across the Islamic world.



The Abbasid Caliphate

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abbasid_Caliphate_850AD.png

10.3.3 Administration under Abbasids

The Abbasid centralized state was managed by a huge bureaucracy. The administration became more organized under the Abbasids with the division of administration into three main bureaus (Diwans)—revenue (Diwan al-kharaj), chancery (Diwan al-rasail) and the army (Diwan al-jaysh). The revenue bureau was entrusted with the responsibility of tax collection, the chancery bureau for the maintenance of records and correspondence and the army bureau was supposed to take care of the payment of

the centralized army and to look after the court expenses and the payment to the pensioners. With the expansion of administration, these bureaus were further subdivided to carry on supplementary activities. Since it became increasingly difficult to supervise these administrative branches by the Caliph, system of checks and balances was devised. With each bureau a controller's office (Diwan al-azimma) was attached and barids were appointed to provide information about all the offices in secret manner. Apart from administrative officials, the Abbasids appointed qazis or judges for dispensing justice.

Civil administration was unified and placed under a powerful official called as Wazir from the time of Al-Mansur. The office of wazir known as wizarat developed into the most characteristic institutions of the Islamic state. The wazir was a powerful official generally well-educated and possessing a knowledge of different branches of administration including military affairs. He presided over the bureaucracy. He was expected to supervise the civil administration. It was through him that the officials communicated with the Caliph. However, it was only by the middle of the 9th century that wazir became the chief of administration, controlling the bureaucracy, forwarding the names of provincial governors to the Caliph in dispensing justice. The term has at times been inaccurately termed as 'prime minister'. Originally, close aides of the Caliph were given the title of Wazir and their powers varied at the pleasure of the Caliph. A few scholars claim that the wizarat is an institution of Persian Sassanid origin. However there are others such as S. D. Goitein who have questioned this view and have pointed out that we must not assume a Persian origin for wizarat merely because the Abbasids borrowed a lot from the Sassanids. Goitein has argued that wizarat was a specific product of the early Abbasid state. He asserts that the word itself is of Arabic and not Persian origin (literally wazir means helper in Arabic). It was first used to name the agents who were helpers or wazirs of the Abbasids cause. By the time of Al-Mansur it became the title of the most prominent official who assisted the Caliph. The position of wazir was dominated by the family of Barmekid family under the Caliphs Al-Mahdi and Harun al-Rashid.

Under the Abbasids, the provincial administration varied from direct supervision under the centralized administration to a loose control exercised by means of a military

governor with the help of a garrison. The provinces located near Baghdad such as Iraq, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Western Iran were directly governed with a governor and the provincial bureaucracy working in tandem with the central government with the purpose of maximizing the payment of tax revenue from the provinces. The tenure of service of the governors was intentionally kept short and a policy of rotation guaranteed that they do not develop local support base and remain at the mercy of the Caliph. The power of the governor was further curbed by separating functions of law and order and collection of taxes and keeping of finances. The judicial function was also assigned to some other official. All these provincial officials thus kept a check on each other and a barid kept an eye on each of these. However, such a strict separation of civil and military functions, frequent rotation of governors and control over them was not always possible since a number of local warlords and members of the royal family who had supported the Caliph had to be placated. Therefore, in a number of cases, various provisions of the provincial governance had to be abandoned. Provinces located far-off from the capital, such as, the ones in Caspian highlands and inner Asian provinces and in North Africa, were made autonomous. Military governors were appointed in the frontier provinces who were given a garrison to assist in tax collection. However, in some provinces governors simply collected tributes and the local people collected taxes. Some other provinces like Khurasan and Transoxiana were administered by the local dynasties. Khurasan was under the control of the Tahirids who paid significant tribute to the Caliph, and Transoxiana was in the effective control of the Samanids who had converted to Islam after integration of Transoxiana into the Islamic Empire.

The Abbasids organized local administration with the basic objective of tax collection. In Iraq and Egypt the local administrative units were divided into revenue units such as kura, tassuj and rustag. Local officials conducted local surveys to find out the land under cultivation, the expected yield and the crops grown which was then communicated to the central government. The assessed tax of a region was divided into various districts and the unit below it. After deducting local expenditures, the rest was sent to the central government. Lands of the local areas did not comprise crown land, the confiscated imperial land of the Byzantines and the Sassanids, the church properties and the reclaimed wasteland. Out of the provincial land, few were reserved to

be given as land grants to the members of the Abbasid family, important courtiers and officials. These grants were known as iqta. There were two types of iqta grants-iqta tamliq and iqta istighlal. The first type of grant generally consisted of uncultivated but cultivable wasteland with an objective of extending area under cultivation. Such lands were evaluated at concessional rate for first few years and later assessed in normal rates with full proprietary right given to the grantee which was also hereditary. The second type of iqta grant was given to those individuals who agreed to pay the central government a fix sum of money in return for the right to tax the peasantry.

Historian Ira M.Lapidus has termed the imperial organization of the Abbasids as a complex bureaucracy highly elaborated at the center and in touch with provincial and local functionaries throughout the empire. However, there was no hierarchal relationship between center on the one hand and the province and the locality on the other. At each level, administration was carried on by independent people. Lapidus further points out that in some cases there were princes or independent governors who administered the provinces, and, in other cases, they were the local village chiefs and landowners without whom the central and provincial governments were helpless. Lapidus concludes that since the government ties were not strictly hierarchical, complex system of constraints and opportunities, obligations and loyalties, bound the central, provincial and local notables to the Abbasid government.

A clear distinction was made between the holding of the Muslim and non-Muslim peasants for the purpose of revenue collection. The Muslims paid a land tax called as ushr which was assessed at one-tenth of the produce and also paid zakat (for charitable purposes) which was assessed at 2.5 per cent of the value of their property. The non-Muslims (zimmis) or those outside the Muslim ummah were supposed to pay jizya. The zimmis were also required to pay a land tax known as kharaj which was assessed at the rate of one-third of the produce.

10.3.4 Islamic Golden Age

The Abbasid period, lasting until the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 CE, is often referred to as the Islamic Golden Age. This remarkable era reached its height during the reign of Harun al-Rashid (786–809 CE), the fifth Abbasid Caliph, renowned

for his patronage of art and science. Under his rule, Baghdad became the world's leading center for advancements in science, philosophy, medicine, and education.

The Abbasid Caliphate's extensive connections with distant empires allowed scholars in Baghdad to collect, translate, and expand upon the knowledge of various civilizations, including the Egyptians, Persians, Indians, Chinese, Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. Harun al-Rashid's intellectual legacy was carried forward by his son, Al-Mamun (813–833 CE), who continued to support scholars, scientists, and artists. Al-Mamun actively encouraged the translation of Greek philosophical and scientific texts into Arabic, granting Muslim scholars access to the rich intellectual traditions of the Greco-Roman world. Works by Plato and Aristotle, in particular, gained immense popularity among Muslim thinkers.

To advance these scholarly efforts, Al-Mamun established the Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad. This prestigious institution welcomed both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, fostering a vibrant intellectual atmosphere. The House of Wisdom aimed to consolidate global knowledge by translating important texts into Arabic, making them widely accessible and promoting intellectual growth throughout the Islamic world.



Bayt al-Hikma, House of Wisdom

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Be%C3%Aft_El_Hikma.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Be%C3%A4ft_El_Hikma.jpg)

10.3.5 Decline of the Abbasids

The Abbasid Caliphate thrived during the early 9th century, primarily due to the capable leadership of its Caliphs and their advisors, despite the challenges of governing a vast and diverse empire. Harun al-Rashid played a crucial role in elevating the Caliphate to its peak while also acting as a significant patron of the arts and sciences. However, his reign was marked by uprisings in Persia and North Africa, prompting him to remove the influential Barmakid family from power. His son, Caliph Al-Mamun, continued his father's legacy by establishing the House of Wisdom and introducing several independent reforms.

Despite these accomplishments, Al-Mamun's reign saw a growing divide between the Caliph and the people, largely due to his formation of a loyal army composed of Central Asian soldiers. This development increased the autonomy of provincial governors, with some, like the governor of Persia, establishing their own

dynasties while maintaining nominal allegiance to the Abbasids. This trend of independent regional rule significantly weakened the central authority of the Caliphate.

Following Al-Mamun's rule, Abbasid power began to erode. Managing such an expansive empire required consistent revenue, but as the Caliphate's control waned, tax collection suffered. To stabilize the state's finances, the Caliphs introduced tax farming, granting tax-collection rights to governors and military leaders. These officials, empowered by their own troops and revenue sources, gradually became independent and less loyal to the Caliphate.

During the reign of Caliph Al-Mutasim (833–842 CE), the divide between the Caliph and the populace deepened further. He established a military force comprising slave soldiers known as ghilman (later called Mamluks). These soldiers, often perceived as superior to the local population, incited resentment and riots in Baghdad. Rather than addressing the unrest, Al-Mutasim relocated the capital to Samarra, approximately 60 miles north of Baghdad. This move further isolated the Caliphs from their subjects, weakening their authority even more.

In Samarra, the Caliphs fell under the influence of their own military, effectively becoming figureheads. Disobedient Caliphs were frequently overthrown or assassinated by their guards. Al-Muwaffaq, the brother of Caliph Al-Mutamid (870–892 CE), attempted to reverse this decline by shifting the capital back to Baghdad. From there, he revitalized the Caliphate, quelled the Zanj Rebellion—a major uprising of African slaves—and brought a brief period of stability.

However, the decline resumed under the reign of Al-Muqtadir (908–932 CE), who ascended the throne at the age of thirteen. Lacking effective leadership, he became a puppet of court factions. Under his rule, several territories declared independence, reducing Abbasid authority to Baghdad and its immediate surroundings. Eventually, Al-Muqtadir was murdered by city guards after failing to pay their salaries amid the empire's financial crisis.

Al-Muqtadir's son, Al-Radi (934–940 CE), is often regarded as the last Caliph to exercise any significant authority. He sought to consolidate power by appointing a powerful governor of Iraq, granting him the title *amir al-umara* ("emir of emirs"). However, this move backfired, as it effectively transferred supreme authority to the titleholder, reducing the Caliph to a mere ceremonial figure. The Shiite Buyid dynasty soon assumed this title, establishing hereditary control over the central provinces of the Islamic Empire while continuing to recognize the Caliph's religious authority.

The Buyids were eventually overthrown by the Sunni Seljuq Turks in the mid-11th century. The Seljuqs, who conquered Iran, Iraq, Syria, and much of Asia Minor, established a new Islamic empire. Like the Buyids, they retained the Abbasid Caliph as a symbolic religious leader while holding actual political and military power as sultans.

The collapse of the Seljuq Sultanate in the 12th century provided an opportunity for Caliph Al-Nasir (1180–1225 CE) to revive Abbasid power in Iraq. His long forty-seven-year reign allowed him to reconquer Mesopotamia and further develop Baghdad as a center of learning. However, his primary rival was the Khwarizmian Empire, which ruled Persia. It is believed that Al-Nasir sought Mongol assistance against Khwarizm. Unfortunately, under his ineffectual successors, this strategy backfired. The Mongols not only destroyed Khwarizm but also turned their attention toward Baghdad.

While the Mongols may have initially intended to govern as the Buyids and Seljuqs had—exercising real power while preserving the Caliph's symbolic authority—the situation changed when Caliph Al-Mustasim (1242–1258 CE) refused to submit and insulted the Mongols. This provoked an invasion, leading to the capture of Baghdad in 1258 CE. The Mongols executed the Caliph and destroyed the city, marking the formal end of the Abbasid Caliphate and the Islamic Golden Age.

In 1261 CE, the Abbasid line was re-established in Egypt, where the Mamluk sultans appointed an Abbasid Caliph in Cairo. However, these Caliphs held only symbolic authority, serving to legitimize the rule of the Mamluks and exercising control

solely over religious matters. Despite their diminished role, the Abbasid dynasty continued in Egypt for over 250 years.

The final chapter of the Abbasid era came in 1517 CE when the Ottoman Empire conquered Egypt. The last Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mutawakkil III, was compelled to surrender his authority to Ottoman Sultan Selim I, marking the end of the long and illustrious history of the Abbasid Caliphate.

Self-Check Exercise -1

- Q.1 Who was the founder of Abbasid Caliphate?
- Q.2 What was the name of the capital city of the Abbasid Caliphate?
- Q.3 What was the function of Diwan al-rasail under Abbasid Caliphate?
- Q.4 Name the two types of iqta grants under the Abbasids.
- Q.5 Define ushr.
- Q.6 Which period in Islamic history is called as the golden age?
- Q.7 Who was the fifth Caliph of Abbasid dynasty?
- Q.8 Who founded the Bayt al-Hikma, the House of Wisdom, in Baghdad?
- Q.9 Write the name of famous mathematician of Abbasid period.
- Q.10 Name the Islamic historian known as the 'Livy of the Arabs'.
- Q.11 Which Abbasid Caliph created his own military force of slave soldiers called ghilman?
- Q.12 Who gave the title of amir al-umara, "emir of emirs," for the governor of Iraq?

10.4 Summary

- The Abbasid dynasty, founded by Abul Abbas al-Saffah in 750 CE after the 'Abbasid Revolution,' introduced significant reforms in Islamic governance.
- This caliphate marked the Islamic Golden Age and became one of the most enduring and influential dynasties in Islamic history.
- They shifted the administrative capital from Syria to Baghdad, transforming it into a flourishing cosmopolitan hub.
- Unlike the Umayyads, the Abbasids promoted non-Arabs to key administrative and military positions, strengthening their authority.

- The relocation to Baghdad spurred rapid urban growth, making it the world's largest city at the time.
- Emphasizing administration over conquest, they downsized the military and established a professional army of Khurasani Arabs and loyal mawali.
- Abbasid governance adopted a cosmopolitan approach, with the Caliph functioning as an absolute monarch, inspired by Byzantine and Sassanid models.
- The administration became more structured with the establishment of diwans (bureaus) for revenue, correspondence, and military affairs.
- The Wizarat emerged as a crucial institution, with the Wazir overseeing bureaucracy and eventually becoming the chief administrator.
- Provincial governance varied from direct control to semi-autonomy, especially in distant regions, with an emphasis on efficient tax collection.
- Land grants, known as iqṭas, were distributed to royal family members, courtiers, and loyal officials.
- The tax system differentiated between Muslims, who paid ushr (10% of produce), and non-Muslims, who paid kharaj (33% of produce). As conversions increased, kharaj was extended to all landowners.
- The period from the Abbasid rise to the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 CE is known as the Islamic Golden Age.
- Harun al-Rashid (786–809 CE), the fifth Abbasid Caliph, was a major patron of arts and sciences, establishing Baghdad as a global center for learning.
- His son, Al-Mamun (813–833 CE), continued these efforts by promoting translations of Greek works and founding the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikma).
- The adoption of the Indian numeral system revolutionized mathematics, with Al-Khwarizmi emerging as a prominent mathematician of the era.
- Historical writing flourished under the Abbasids, drawing from Greco-Roman traditions. Notable historians included Al-Tabari, Al-Masudi, and Al-Biruni.
- Agricultural advancements included improved irrigation, innovative farming techniques, and the introduction of crops like cotton, rice, and citrus fruits from India and China.

- By the reign of Caliph Al-Radi, Abbasid control had shrunk to Baghdad. To curb the power of independent governors, he introduced the title Emir of Emirs, but this further diminished the Caliph's authority.
- The Abbasids gradually became symbolic leaders until Caliph Al-Nasir briefly revived their influence. However, his successors failed to maintain power, culminating in the empire's fall when the Mongols sacked Baghdad in 1258 CE.

10.5 Glossary

Barid: The barid was the state-run courier service of the Umayyad and later Abbasid Caliphates.

Coup d'état: The violent overthrow or alteration of an existing government by a small group.

Iqta: In the Islamic empire of the Caliphate, land granted to army officials for limited periods in lieu of salary.

Mamluk: Mamluk is a member of one of the armies of slaves established during the Abbasid era that later won political control of many Muslim states.

10.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Ans.1 Abul Abbas al-Saffah

Ans.2 Baghdad

Ans.3 Maintenance of records and correspondence

Ans.4 Iqta tamliq and iqta istighlal

Ans.5 A tax on the agricultural produce of land levied on the Muslims which was assessed at one-tenth of the produce.

Ans.6 Abbasid period

Ans.7 Harun al-Rashid

Ans.8 Al-Mamun

Ans.9 Al-Khwarizmi

Ans.10 Al-Tabari

Ans.11 Al-Mutasim

Ans.12 Caliph Al-Radi

10.7 Suggested Readings

1. Abbas, Tahir, *Islamic Radicalism and Multicultural Politics: The British Experience*, London, UK: Routledge, 2011.
2. Duri, Abd Al-Aziz, *Early Islamic Institutions-Administration and Taxation from the Caliphate to the Umayyads and Abbasids*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2011.
3. Goitein, S.D, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1968.
4. Humphreys, R. Stephen, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*, Revised Edition Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
5. Lapidus, Ira M., *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
6. Lambton, Ann S., *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, London: Routledge, 2013.

10.8 Terminal Questions

1. What do you understand by Abbasid Revolution?
2. Analyse the political, administrative and economic policies of the Abbasids.
3. The Abbasid administrative framework was highly complex. How were the Abbasids controlling such a vast central imperial bureaucracy, provincial and local agents and magnates?
4. Why is the Abbasid historical period regarded as the Islamic Golden Age?
5. Discuss the causes of the decline of Abbasid Caliphate.

UNIT-11

ARAB CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVILIZATION

Structure

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Objectives

11.3 Arab Contributions

11.3.1 Mathematics

11.3.2 Astronomy

11.3.3 Architecture

11.3.4 Medicine

11.3.5 Navigation and Geography

11.3.6 Horticulture

11.3.7 Others Sciences

11.3.8 Language and Calligraphy

11.3.9 Historiography

11.3.10 Music

11.3.11 Philosophy

11.3.12 Crafts

Self-Check Exercise-1

11.4 Summary

11.5 Glossary

11.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

11.7 Suggested Readings

11.8 Terminal Questions

11.1 Introduction

The Arabs originally inhabited the Arabian Desert and embraced Islam in the 7th century CE. Following their conversion, they conquered the Middle East, overthrowing the Sassanian and Byzantine empires, and established a series of Arab-Islamic empires stretching from Spain to Central Asia and from the Caucasus to India. The period

between the 7th and 13th centuries witnessed significant cultural and intellectual advancements across Asia, North Africa, Southern Europe, and the Middle East.

The Arab world evolved into a vibrant cosmopolitan civilization, with Islam emerging as the common religion and cultural identity for Persians, Turks, and other communities. While Islam provided the spiritual foundation, the Arabic language served as the unifying cultural force.

Arab civilization was shaped by a blend of classical Arab traditions, Islamic values, and the accumulated knowledge of ancient civilizations. The Arabs preserved and expanded existing knowledge in various fields, including governance, philosophy, history, art, architecture, literature, music, mathematics, biology, medicine, engineering, navigation, and commercial law. Though Arab dominance over Islamic empires was relatively brief, Islam continued to thrive as both a religion and a cultural force throughout the Middle East. Many Arab contributions have since become integral to global civilization.

11.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Evaluate the contributions of Arabs in mathematics, astronomy, architecture, medicine, navigation, geography, horticulture, and other sciences.
- Understand their advancements in language, calligraphy, historiography, music, philosophy, and craftsmanship.

11.3 Arab Contributions to Civilization

11.3.1 Mathematics

The Arabs introduced the concept of sifr (zero), revolutionizing the approach to complex mathematical problems. Their development of the decimal system and Arabic numerals significantly advanced scientific progress.

Arabs pioneered algebra, with Al-Khwarizmi, known as the "Father of Algebra," leading its development. His work was driven by the need for precise calculations, particularly for land division in accordance with Islamic inheritance laws.

In addition to algebra, Arabs made notable advancements in trigonometry and introduced calendar reforms with minimal errors. The influence of Arab mathematics is evident in the writings of European scholars and in the curricula of medieval European universities.



Al-Khwarizmi

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Al-Khwarizmi.jpg>

11.3.2 Astronomy

Similar to the development of algebra, advancements in the astrolabe were largely motivated by religious requirements. It was refined to accurately determine sunrise and sunset times, crucial for observing fasting hours during Ramadan. During the Middle Ages, Arab astronomers produced detailed astronomical charts and tables in observatories like those at Maragha and Palmyra. Their work enabled precise

measurements of degrees, calculations of longitude and latitude, and studies on the relative speeds of light and sound.

The *Zij al-Sindhind*, written by the Persian mathematician Al-Khwarizmi in 830, was the first significant Islamic text on astronomy. It featured tables charting the movements of the Sun, Moon, and the five known planets. Al-Biruni, one of the era's most prominent scientists, proposed the concept of Earth's rotation on its axis, an idea confirmed by Galileo six centuries later.

Arab astronomers such as Al-Fazari, Al-Farghani, and Al-Zarqali expanded on Ptolemy's work, contributing to the development of the magnetic compass and zodiac mapping. By the 13th century, the Maragha observatory had become a global hub for astronomical research, attracting scholars from around the world.

11.3.3 Architecture

Early Arab architecture primarily aimed to glorify Islam, focusing on the construction of magnificent mosques and mausoleums. One notable innovation was the horseshoe arch, adapted from Roman architecture into a distinct Arab style that later influenced European designs. The Great Mosque of Damascus, built in the early 8th century, exemplifies this style.

The Mosque of Ibn Tulun, constructed in 9th-century Cairo under Ahmad Ibn Tulun, is the city's oldest mosque and served as inspiration for many European cathedrals. Architectural elements like the Tudor arch, seen in Wells Cathedral (England) and Chartres Cathedral (France), were influenced by Arabian trefoil, cusp, and ogee arches.

The iconic Muslim minaret, inspired by Greek lighthouses, evolved into the campanile in Europe, with San Marcos Square in Venice being a prominent example. Ribbed vaults found in European architecture were adapted from Islamic mosques in Jerusalem, Mecca, Tripoli, Cairo, Damascus, and Constantinople. Additionally, Arabs

introduced cubal transitional supports under domes, later incorporated into 11th- and 12th-century European cathedrals and palaces, such as those in Palermo.

Arab architecture was renowned for its elegance and innovation. Notable structures include the Great Mosque of Cordoba, the Lion Court of the Alhambra Palace in Granada, and various medieval European religious and civic buildings adorned with Arabesque designs, intricate calligraphy, and vibrant colors. The influence of Arab conquests extended into Eastern Europe and Asia, leaving visible remnants in regions like Russia. A striking example is the Bibi Khanum Mosque in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, celebrated for its grand design and historical significance.

11.3.4 Medicine

Medicine held a significant place in medieval Islamic culture, with Arab scholars advancing the medical knowledge inherited from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. Among the most prominent figures was Al-Razi, an acclaimed alchemist, philosopher, and physician. His most influential works include *Kitab al-Mansuri* and *Kitab al-Hawi*. Al-Razi was the first to distinguish between measles and smallpox, linking these and other diseases to human contamination and contagion. He introduced several medical innovations, such as mercurial ointments and the use of animal gut for surgical sutures.

Another distinguished scholar was Ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna. Widely regarded as the greatest medical writer of the Middle Ages, his renowned book *The Canon of Medicine* compiled the entire body of medical knowledge available from ancient and Islamic sources. Ibn Sina explored the contagious nature of tuberculosis and the transmission of diseases through water and soil.

Ibn Sina also made significant contributions to mental health, laying the groundwork for modern psychotherapy. He believed that some illnesses were psychosomatic and often helped patients uncover subconscious experiences related to their conditions. His groundbreaking work earned him the title "Prince of Physicians" during his era.



Ibn Sina or Avicenna

Source:[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Avicenne_-_Avicenna_-_Ibn_Sina_\(980-1037\)_CIPB2067.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Avicenne_-_Avicenna_-_Ibn_Sina_(980-1037)_CIPB2067.jpg)

Ibn Khatib, a prominent physician from the emirate of Granada, explored the concept of disease transmission through contagion in his treatise on the 14th-century plague. Another Arab scholar, in his work *Kitab al-Maliki*, introduced an early understanding of the capillary system. Meanwhile, the Syrian physician Ibn al-Nafis made groundbreaking discoveries about pulmonary circulation. He argued that the heart's pores were closed, preventing direct passage between its chambers. According to him, blood moved to the lungs through the arterial vein and then circulated into the heart's left chamber.

Arab pharmacies introduced numerous herbs and spices, such as basil, oregano, thyme, fennel, anise, liquorice, coriander, rosemary, nutmeg, and cinnamon, to European cuisine. Islamic physicians used camphor, cloves, poppy, hemp, myrrh, syrups, juleps, and rosewater as medicinal remedies.

11.3.5 Navigation and Geography

Medieval Arabs advanced ancient navigation techniques, including the invention of the magnetic needle in the 9th century. One of the most notable geographers of the 12th century, Al-Idrisi, created an atlas commissioned by Roger II of Sicily, featuring over 70 detailed maps covering the Mediterranean, Northern Africa, Europe, and parts of Asia. His work, *Kitab nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-afaq* ("The Pleasure Excursion of One Who Is Eager to Traverse the Regions of the World"), was regarded as the most significant geographical compilation of the medieval period.

The 14th-century Moroccan explorer Ibn Battuta, though not a professional geographer, traveled more than 75,000 miles across Turkey, Bulgaria, Russia, Persia, Central Asia, and India during the reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. Appointed as an ambassador to China, he extended his travels to North and West Africa. His book *Rehla* (Safarnama or Journey) documented the political, social, and economic conditions of the regions he visited.

Hassan al-Wazzan, another Moroccan scholar, was captured, enslaved, and presented to Pope Leo X, who freed him and baptized him as Johannes Leo, famously known as Leo Africanus. His book, *Description of Africa* (1526), became the primary source of information about Africa for nearly two centuries.

Ibn Majid, renowned for his navigational expertise, earned the title "Lion of the Sea." Some historians suggest he guided Vasco da Gama to India, as Portuguese sailors lacked the expertise of the Indian Ocean mariners.

11.3.6 Horticulture

Arabs made remarkable advancements in botany and agriculture. In the 12th century, Ibn al-Awam authored *Al-Filahat*, an influential work detailing over 500 plant species, grafting techniques, soil management, and methods for treating diseased vines and trees. They introduced innovative vine grafting techniques, producing multi-colored grapes and transforming European viticulture. Arab soldiers brought peach, apricot, and loquat trees to southern Europe, while promoting olive cultivation in Greece, Spain, and Sicily. Additionally, they introduced sugar from India and cotton from Egypt into European markets.

For Arabs, coffee (*qahwah*) was more than just a stimulating beverage; it symbolized social connection and cultural tradition. They also perfected fruit preservation techniques, ensuring fresh produce remained available year-round.

Arab horticulture further advanced the cultivation of fragrant flowers and herbs for perfumes. Their meticulously designed gardens, intended to delight the senses, inspired European horticultural practices. Returning Crusaders introduced hybrid bulb flowers to Europe, while trade caravans enriched European cuisine with rice, sesame, pepper, ginger, cloves, melons, shallots, dates, figs, oranges, lemons, and other citrus fruits.

Arab contributions extended to cosmetics, influencing European fashion with lipsticks, nail polish, eyeshadow, eyeliner, perfumes, hair dyes, body lotions, and wigs. The *ton tour*, a pointed cap with a flowing silk veil popular in medieval Europe, reflected this influence. Modern jewelry designs also trace their roots to ancient Arab ornamentation.

11.3.7 Other Sciences

Arab contributions to engineering encompassed water wheels, irrigation systems, cisterns, wells, and water clocks. In 860 CE, the three sons of Musa Ibn Shakir compiled the *Book on Artifices*, describing 100 technical inventions.

Al-Kindi, a renowned philosopher and scientist, wrote extensively on specific weight, tides, light reflection, and optics. In the 10th century, Al-Haytham (Alhazen)

authored Kitab al-Manazir (Book of Optics), earning him the title "Father of Optics." He introduced the intromission theory of vision and conducted groundbreaking experiments on lenses, mirrors, refraction, reflection, and light dispersion. His research also explored optical illusions, the rainbow, and the camera obscura, laying the foundation for modern photographic devices.

Al-Haytham's contributions extended to atmospheric refraction, eclipses, and the early development of microscopes and telescopes. His emphasis on empirical observation and experimentation earned him recognition as a pioneer of the scientific method and experimental physics, with some referring to him as the "first scientist."

11.3.8 Language and Calligraphy

The Arabic language held special significance among Muslims, as the Quran was revealed in Arabic. Arabic poetry, literature, and drama influenced both Eastern and Western cultures. Arab scholars translated classical Greek and Roman works by Aristotle, Plato, Hippocrates, Ptolemy, Dioscorides, and Galen. Some scholars believe that the 12th-century Arabic legend Layla and Majnun, penned by Nizami Ganjavi, inspired Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.

Ibn Tufail's philosophical novel Hayy ibn Yaqzan (Alive, Son of Awake) is considered one of the earliest examples of modern fiction. Translated into Latin in 1671 and English in 1708, it bears similarities to Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. Other notable works of Arab literature include A Thousand and One Nights and Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat.

Arabic influences are evident in Western literature, as seen in Shakespeare's characters like Othello and the Prince of Morocco, Marlowe's Tamburlaine, and George Peele's The Battle of Alcazar.

Arabic calligraphy, known as khatt, emerged as a revered art form, embellishing mosques and public structures in Palermo, Cordoba, Lisbon, and Malaga. The most prominent cursive styles included Naskh, Nastaliq, Diwani, Thuluth, and Reqa, while

Kufic was the oldest script. Calligraphers traditionally used a qalam, a pen made from dried reed or bamboo. Before the widespread use of paper, writing was done on papyrus and parchment.

11.3.9 Historiography

Arab historiography finds its roots in the Quran and Hadith, but the development of scientific historiography began in the 8th century, during the time of Prophet Muhammad. Arabs introduced the isnad system, which meticulously documented credible sources, enabling historians to access accurate and comprehensive information.

Ibn Khaldun, one of the most renowned Arab historiographers, authored the Book of Examples. Historian Arnold Toynbee praised him, stating: "Ibn Khaldun has conceived and formulated a philosophy of history that remains the greatest work of its kind ever produced by any mind in any era."



Ibn Khaldun

Source:[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Ibn_Khaldun#/media/File:Bust_of_Ibn_Khaldun_\(Casbah_of_Bejaia,_Algeria\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Ibn_Khaldun#/media/File:Bust_of_Ibn_Khaldun_(Casbah_of_Bejaia,_Algeria).jpg)

11.3.10 Music

Many musical instruments found in medieval Europe and classical music trace their origins to the Arab world. Instruments like the lyre, zither, harp, drum, tambourine, flute, oboe, and reed either maintain their original forms or are adapted versions of early Arab designs. The mandolin and guitar, for instance, evolved from the oud, a pear-shaped string instrument known for its rich, melancholic sound.

The Arabic rabab, often called the spiked fiddle, is the oldest known bowed string instrument and the ancestor of all European bowed instruments, including the rebec, the Byzantine lyra, and the violin. The Crusaders introduced the bagpipe to Europe after

their campaigns in Palestine, associating it with the British Isles. Interestingly, the British Army reintroduced the bagpipe to Palestine, where the Bedouin Corps under Sir John Glubb revived this once-lost musical tradition.

Arabic poetry was frequently set to music, characterized by delicate minor-key sequences and distinctive rhythmic patterns.

11.3.11 Philosophy

Arabian philosophy, known as falsafah, refers to the intellectual traditions of Islamic scholars who, inspired by Greek philosophy, primarily used Arabic as their medium of expression. This philosophical movement flourished between the 9th and 12th centuries, promoting harmony between religious faith and scientific inquiry within a unified framework.

Arab philosophers re-examined the works of Aristotle, Plotinus, and Plato, exploring profound questions about divine creation, the nature and destiny of the human soul, and the existence of both visible and invisible realms.

Key figures included:

- **Al-Kindi**, who viewed philosophy as the study of nature and expanded upon Plato and Aristotle's ideas.
- **Al-Farabi**, who envisioned an ideal human society based on philosophical principles.
- **Ibn Sina (Avicenna)**, whose theories on form and matter greatly influenced medieval Christian Scholasticism.
- **Ibn Khaldun**, renowned for his work *Muqaddimah*, which analyzed the rise and fall of civilizations.

11.3.12 Crafts

For the ancient Arabs, art was seen as an expression of devotion to God, leading to remarkable advancements in craftsmanship. Their expertise extended to glassware,

ceramics, and textiles, often embellished with intricate mosaics, tiles, carvings, and paintings.

Syrian beakers, rock crystals, and Azulejos tiles were highly prized in Europe, while the iridescent luster pottery from Moorish kilns in Valencia gained widespread acclaim. Arab artisans also developed innovative glazing techniques, producing brilliant blue hues that became famous under various names.

Arab mastery in silk weaving was exemplified by the coronation cape worn by Robert II, King of Sicily. Their high-quality textiles—such as cotton muslin, damask linen, and Shiraz wool—were highly valued across European markets. Moroccan tanners perfected the production of soft, plant-dyed leather, known for its lasting vibrancy. This leather was often used for bookbinding, featuring gold tooling and colored panels, a style that remains popular in cities like Venice and Florence.

The Arabs also revolutionized metalwork, advancing the production of crucible steel, which was used to forge the legendary Damascene swords. Their craftsmanship extended to finely cut brass chandeliers, ornate salvers, jewel-encrusted cases, and the astrolabe—an instrument showcasing both technical precision and artistic elegance.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 Who is known as the Father of Algebra?
- Q.2 Name the first major Muslim work of astronomy.
- Q.3 Write the name of one of the most important monuments of Samarkand.
- Q.4 Name the two most significant works of alchemist and philosopher Al-Razi.
- Q.5 Who was the author of book Canon which surveyed the entire medical knowledge available from ancient and Muslim sources?
- Q.6 Name the famous geographer of the medieval world who was commissioned by the Norman King, Roger II of Sicily to compile a world atlas.
- Q.7 Who wrote Rehla (Safarnama)?
- Q.8 Name the highly educated Moroccan who was captured, enslaved and presented as a gift to Pope Leo X who freed him and christened him

Johannes Leo.

Q.9 Who was Ibn Majid?

Q.10 Who wrote Al-Filahat?

Q.11 Name the Arabian scientist who is regarded as the Father of Optics.

Q.12 Write the name of two best loved and most widely read of Arab literature.

Q.13 What is Arab calligraphy known as?

Q.14 Name the system of historiography developed by the Arabs.

Q.15 What is rabrab?

Q.16 Write the name of any two Arab philosophers of the Middle Ages.

11.4 Summary

- The contributions of the Arabs to global civilization are both significant and enduring.
- In mathematics, they made remarkable advancements, particularly in algebra and trigonometry.
- Arab astronomers, including Al-Fazari, Al-Farghani, and Al-Zarqali, compiled detailed astronomical charts and tables.
- Their architectural achievements are evident in the construction of magnificent mosques and mausoleums.
- Arab scholars revolutionized medicine, with renowned physicians like Al-Razi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Khatib making significant contributions.
- They enhanced ancient navigational practices, with explorers such as Al-Idrisi, Ibn Battuta, Hassan al-Wazzan, and Ibn Majid leading the way.
- The Arabs also excelled in horticulture, with Ibn al-Awam's treatise Al-Filahat offering valuable insights into agriculture. Their innovations led to the cultivation of fragrant flowers and herbs used in perfumery.
- In engineering, they introduced advancements like the water wheel, irrigation systems, cisterns, leveled water wells, and the water clock.
- Arabic poetry, literature, and drama influenced cultures both in the East and the West, while Arabic calligraphy became a distinctive art form within the Muslim world.

- The Arabs pioneered a system of historiography known as isnad, which meticulously documented reliable sources, providing modern historians with accurate information. Ibn Khaldun stood out as a leading figure in this field.
- They made significant contributions to music, as many medieval European and classical instruments trace their origins to Arabic designs.
- The influence of Arabic philosophers, including Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Averroes, profoundly shaped Western thought, particularly in natural philosophy, psychology, metaphysics, logic, and ethics.
- In essence, while Europe remained in a period of stagnation, Arab civilization reached its intellectual and artistic zenith.
- However, it is important to recognize that Arab achievements were shaped by the ancient cultures of Greece, Rome, China, India, Byzantium, and others.

11.5 Glossary

Alchemist: A person who transforms or creates something through a seemingly magical process.

Astrolabe: An instrument used for making astronomical measurements, typically of the altitudes of celestial bodies, and in navigation for calculating latitude.

Cartographer: A person who draws or produces maps.

Crusader: A person who campaigns vigorously for political, social, or religious change; a campaigner.

Horticulture: The art or practice of garden cultivation and management.

11.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Al-Khwarizmi

Ans.2 Zij al-Sindhind

Ans.3 The Bibi Khanum Mosque

Ans.4 Kitab al-Mansuri and Kitab al-hawi

Ans.5 Ibn Sina or Avicenna

Ans.6 Al-Idrisi

Ans.7 Ibn Battuta

Ans.8 Hassan al-Wazzan

Ans.9 He was the famous Arab navigator and cartographer who helped Vasco Da Gama reach India. He was nicknamed as 'Lion of the Sea'.

Ans.10 Ibn al-Awam

Ans.11 Al-Haytham (Alhacen or Alhazen)

Ans.12 A Thousand and One Nights and Rubaiyat

Ans.13 Khatt

Ans.14 Isnad

Ans.15 Also known as the spiked fiddle, rabrab is the earliest known bowed string instrument and the ancestor of all European bowed instruments.

Ans.16 Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi

11.7 Suggested Readings

1. Arnold, Sir Thomas and Alfred Guillaume (ed.), The Legacy of Islam, Oxford University Press.
2. Hayes, John (edited), The Genius of Arab Civilization: Source of Renaissance, New York University Press, 1975.
3. Hitti, K.Philips, History of the Arabs, St.Martin Press, Tenth Edition, 1970.
4. Hoyland, Robert G, Arabia and the Arabs. Routledge, 2002.
5. Lewis, Bernard, The Arabs in History, London: Oxford University Press, 6th revised ed, 2002.

11.8 Terminal Questions

1. 'Arab Civilization in the Medieval Period left behind a legacy of discoveries and achievements'. Justify this statement.
2. Discuss the contribution of Arabs in the field of sciences.
3. What was the contribution of Arabs in the field of navigation and geography?
4. How did Arabs contributed to the development of music, language and calligraphy and philosophy?
5. Write short notes on the following:-
 - (i) Historiography under Arabs in medieval period
 - (ii) Development of Arabian Crafts during the Middle Ages

UNIT-12

FEUDALISM IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE- I

Structure

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Objectives
- 12.3 Feudalism in Medieval Europe
 - 12.3.1 Early Formulations
 - 12.3.2 Ties of Dependence
 - 12.3.3 Mode of Production
- Self-Check Exercise-1
- 12.4 Summary
- 12.5 Glossary
- 12.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise
- 12.7 Suggested Readings
- 12.8 Terminal Questions

12.1 Introduction

By the early 10th century, Western Europe experienced the emergence of a new social structure that stood in contrast to the Greco-Roman system. The slave-based society gradually gave way to feudalism, a system shaped by a blend of Roman and Germanic traditions. The term feudalism became widely recognized through the works of 18th-century French philosophers like Boulainvilliers and Montesquieu, who used it to describe the fragmented sovereignty held by numerous petty princes and lords during the Middle Ages.

During the French Revolution, the term's scope expanded to include the various injustices associated with the Ancien Régime. Since then, feudalism has been interpreted in diverse ways. However, most scholars agree that between the 10th and 12th centuries, it dominated Western and Central Europe as both a political framework and a social system. At its core, feudalism was a land-based structure of rights and

responsibilities that shaped European society for centuries. Debates surrounding feudalism typically focus on its origins, characteristics, and long-term effects

12.2 Objectives

Upon completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyze various scholarly interpretations of European feudalism.
- Understand the early development of feudal structures in Europe.
- Examine feudalism as a system based on dependent relationships.
- Describe feudalism as a mode of production.

12.3 Feudalism in Medieval Europe

12.3.1 Early Formulations

Early historians, such as F. W. Maitland and Karl Bucher, often highlighted the legal aspects of feudalism, including fiefs, vassalage, military service, and the judicial authority exercised by lords. They traced the origins of these practices to the Germanic kingdoms and the Roman Empire, emphasizing continuity with earlier traditions.

In the late 19th century, British legal historian F. W. Maitland conducted groundbreaking research on feudalism. He identified its defining characteristics as the decentralization of political authority, the privatization of public power, and a military structure upheld through private agreements. Thus, feudalism functioned both as a system of governance and as a method for maintaining the military forces essential to its survival.

Modern historians often define feudalism more narrowly, emphasizing the voluntary and personal bonds of mutual loyalty, protection, and support among the administrative, military, and ecclesiastical elites of medieval Europe. They distinguish these relationships from the involuntary obligations associated with unfree tenures, which are categorized under the manorial system.



F.W Maitland

Source:<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/Maitland.FW.jpg>

12.3.1 Early Formulations and Origins of Feudalism

Medieval European political structures appeared to diverge significantly from ancient traditions. The rise of feudalism, marked by the fragmentation of political power, was often linked to the customs of the so-called "barbarian" Germanic tribes responsible for the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century. Early legal and dynastic histories typically associated feudalism with political and economic decline. Max Weber described this era as one of a "natural economy," while Karl Bucher referred to it as a "closed house economy."

However, by the late 19th century, most professional historians moved beyond the view of the "barbarian invasions" as purely destructive. Instead, they began examining the complex transition from the ancient world to medieval civilization.

The Roman origin theory of feudalism, advocated by Fustel de Coulanges, emphasized the continuity of Roman agricultural structures, such as *mansi* (farm units) and *villae* (rural estates). This perspective significantly shaped historical interpretations during the time. In the early 20th century, historians like Henri See (France), Otto Seeck (Belgium), and Alfons Dopsch (Austria) further highlighted the connections between the Germanic kingdoms and the Roman Empire.

Dopsch, in particular, argued that medieval European landholding patterns, social structures, and political systems were rooted in the organizational framework of the late Roman Empire. Despite the disruptions caused by invasions, he maintained that trade continued along Roman roads, facilitating the exchange of both luxury goods and everyday items. Towns endured, and the presence of local markets challenged the idea of a return to a purely natural economy. Dopsch famously stated, "The Germans were not enemies seeking to destroy Roman culture; rather, they preserved and expanded it."

Even Ferdinand Lot, a French historian who viewed the end of antiquity as a period of significant decline, acknowledged the gradual nature of the transition. He noted that sustained contact between Roman and Germanic societies facilitated the diffusion of Roman institutions into the emerging barbarian kingdoms.

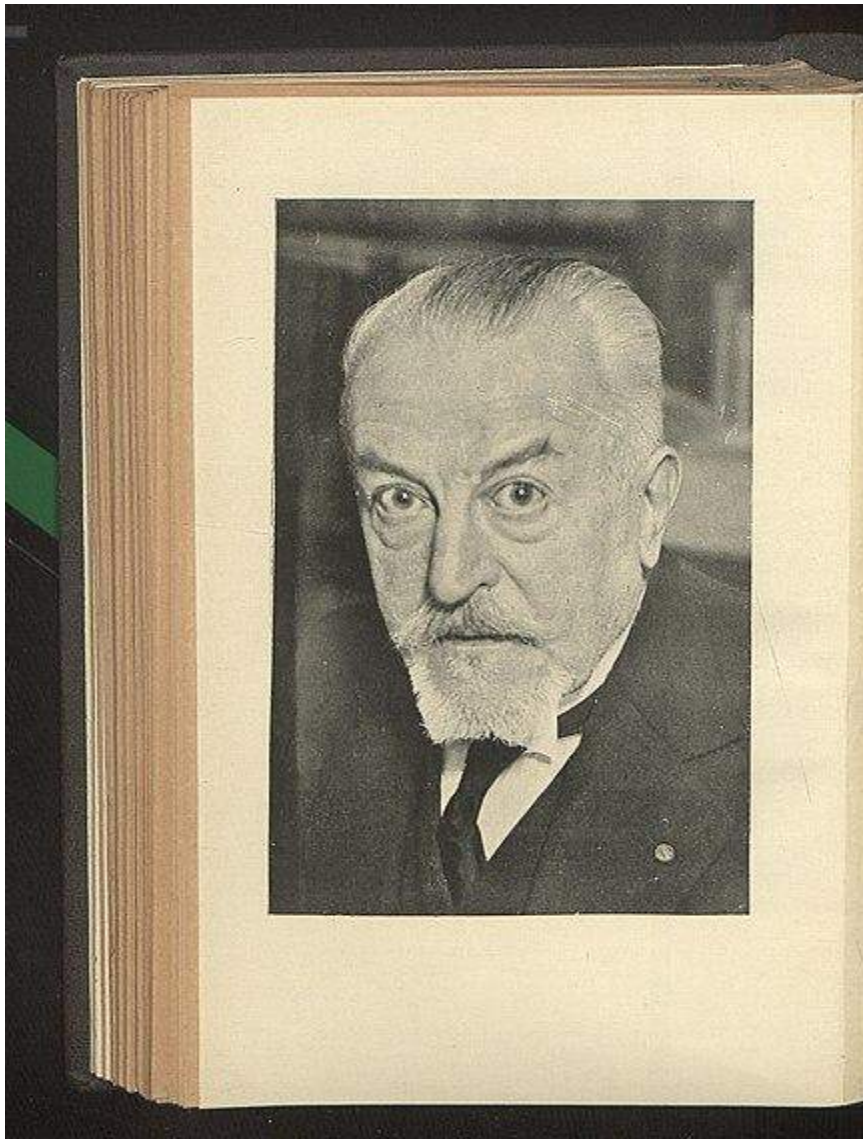
12.3.2 Ties of Dependence

Belgian historian Henri Pirenne offered a significant explanation for the rise of feudalism, attributing it to the disruption of trade networks. However, his theory did not focus extensively on defining feudalism itself.

In the early 20th century, two distinct yet complementary interpretations of feudalism emerged. The mainstream liberal view defined feudalism as a hierarchical system based on relationships of obedience and subordination, with reciprocal obligations between lords and vassals. Under this arrangement, a free man (vassal) voluntarily pledged loyalty and military service to a more powerful free man (lord), who,

in return, provided protection and sustenance. This bond was often formalized through the grant of a fief—a parcel of land.

Historians such as F. L. Ganshof and F. M. Stenton argued that, in its strictest sense, feudalism referred specifically to these institutional relationships. They believed the term should primarily apply to the political structures that emerged following the collapse of the Carolingian Empire and influenced surrounding regions.



Henry Pirenne

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Henri_Pirenne_\(47212412\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Henri_Pirenne_(47212412).jpg)

The second theory, primarily championed by Marxist scholars, particularly Soviet historians, emphasized the economic foundation of feudal society. In the 19th century, Karl Marx had already proposed a framework for understanding human history through distinct modes of production, which shaped social, political, and ideological structures. Following this perspective, Marxist historians interpreted the system of mutual yet unequal personal relationships among the military elite as a secondary outcome of broader socioeconomic relations. These relationships operated within a production system characterized by limited commodity exchange.

French historian Marc Bloch, however, adopted a different approach. He moved beyond the narrow legalistic interpretation and the economically deterministic view, instead focusing on the various forms of human relationships, which he described as ties of interdependence. According to Bloch, feudalism reflected a social condition marked by widespread personal obligations and protective relationships, stemming from fragmented political authority and highly divided property rights.

Bloch further noted that kinship bonds became stronger as feudalism evolved. Blood ties played a crucial role in ensuring individual support and protection, particularly as the state's capacity to maintain security diminished. This period also witnessed the rise of economic unity, with extended families forming close-knit associations. These groups not only shared common living spaces and cultivated collective fields but also collectively managed their obligations, such as paying dues and performing services for the feudal lord.



Marc Bloch

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Marc_Bloch#/media/File:Marc_Bloch.jpg

Bloch contended that, despite regional and social differences, feudal society was fundamentally characterized by a "human nexus," where individuals recognized their subordination to others. This dependency was most evident in the practice of vassalage, a relationship unique to the militarized upper classes. Political circumstances and prevailing societal attitudes placed significant importance on the mutual exchange of protection and loyalty. In an agrarian economy with limited monetary circulation, fiefs or land grants were commonly offered to vassals instead of salaries.

The lower social strata were bound by a network of personal dependencies, with vassalage as the central feature. This system involved strict control by superiors and near-absolute authority for protectors, resulting in significant economic benefits. While Bloch did not consider the manor itself a feudal institution, he acknowledged its role in extending feudal influence across a broader population. He viewed the variations within and between feudal societies as reflections of these broader ties of dependence, shaped by the complexity of noble associations, the degree of peasant subjugation, and the significance of monetary transactions. Thus, Bloch treated "feudalism" as a flexible

analytical framework for comparing local phenomena rather than a rigid definition of medieval social structures.

Bloch also highlighted the internal transformations within feudalism. He identified the mid-11th century as a period of profound societal change, proposing the theory of two feudal ages. While the second feudal age did not entirely break from the first, it introduced significant advancements across various domains. This period saw demographic growth, the consolidation of human settlements, improved communication, increased trade, urban expansion, and a more stable monetary system, all of which prompted a reassessment of social values.

Alongside the decline of "classical feudalism," kinship bonds weakened, and social groups became smaller. The rise of individualism became evident in emerging sectors of growth and development. The expansion of Latin Christianity, linguistic assimilation, the revival of Roman law, and successive political empowerment's further fueled this transformation.

Bloch's analysis marked a significant breakthrough in understanding medieval societies, offering a comprehensive and nuanced perspective. However, subsequent research has led to modifications of his thesis. Critics argue that, while Bloch acknowledged the slow but continuous changes in feudal society, he often failed to identify the driving forces behind these transformations. His explanations tended to describe social dynamics rather than uncover their underlying causes. Additionally, scholars have criticized his work for its imprecise chronology, rigid state conception, and outdated views on lineage.

Mode of Production

Marxist historians, on the other hand, emphasized the primacy of economic forces and production relations, interpreting other aspects of feudal society as reflections of its economic foundation. While feudalism had long been analyzed as a land-based economy characterized by limited commodity exchange, British historian

Perry Anderson further refined this theory in his 1978 work *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*.

Anderson argued that feudalism arose from the collision of two distinct modes of production: the primitive Germanic tribal system and the ancient Roman slave economy. In his view, feudalism was a unique product of the fusion of these Germanic and Roman legacies. This Marxist framework led to diverse interpretations. For instance, Guy Bois's detailed study of the French village of Lournand supported Georges Duby's findings while extending the argument about the dialectical relationship between economy and production during the period between the Germanic invasions and the early medieval era in feudal England.

Anderson challenged the conventional portrayal of feudalism as a period of economic decline. Instead, he described it as an advanced system that increased agricultural productivity and surplus compared to the classical slave economy. He identified several structural contradictions within feudalism that ultimately propelled the agrarian economy forward.

Feudal lords extracted surplus from peasants through various forms, including labor services, rents in kind, and customary dues. This exploitation was enforced through politico-legal structures, with serfdom being the most common manifestation. This system created a lawful fusion of economic exploitation and political authority, known in Marxist terminology as extra-economic coercion.

Peasants were subject to the jurisdiction of their lord, but the lord's property rights were not absolute. His landholdings were contingent upon obligations to his superior while also being entitled to services and dues from his own vassals. This chain of dependent tenures, tied to military service, extended up to the monarch, who theoretically held all lands as his domain.

As a result, political sovereignty was fragmented rather than centralized, with power distributed hierarchically. Anderson argued that while state functions were vertically dispersed, economic and political relations remained tightly integrated at each

level. In his view, this division of sovereignty was a defining characteristic of the feudal mode of production.



Perry Anderson

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Perry_Anderson#/media/File:Perry_Anderson_at_Fronteiras_do_Pensamento_Porto_Alegre.jpg

Anderson viewed feudalism as a 'synthesis' arising from the simultaneous breakdown of primitive-communal and slave-based production systems. He argued that no pure form of feudalism existed historically across Europe. Instead, medieval European societies were composite structures where various production modes coexisted and intertwined with feudalism. Drawing from Soviet historians like Liublinskaya, Gutnove, and Udaltsova, Anderson proposed a three-tiered regional classification of feudalism:

1. **First Zone:** This zone included northern France and its neighboring regions, where Anderson identified a balanced blend of Roman and Germanic elements.

2. **Second Zone:** Situated south of the core region, encompassing Provence, Italy, and Spain, this zone exhibited a stronger Roman influence. Roman legal concepts, such as property being free, heritable, and transferable, shaped feudal landholding patterns. Rural society here was diverse, featuring manors, freehold peasants, latifundia, and urban landowners.
3. **Third Zone:** This area, covering Germany, Scandinavia, and England, experienced limited Roman influence. Communal institutions among the allodial peasantry remained strong, slowing the transition to feudalism. Consequently, serfdom emerged in Saxony only by the late 12th century and never fully took root in Sweden. According to Anderson, feudalism in Germany became fully established by the 12th century, while in England, the Normans imposed a centralized feudal model from above.

Anderson emphasized feudalism's dynamic nature, noting that tensions between lords and peasants spurred productivity. Lords sought to maximize labour services and in-kind dues, achieving higher productivity on noble demesnes compared to peasant plots. However, as surplus grew, the lord's direct involvement in production decreased. Peasant resistance, technological advancements, and customary practices allowed some benefits of increased productivity to reach the peasants.

Challenging the view of urban decline in medieval Europe, Anderson argued that although medieval towns were smaller than ancient cities, they played a progressive role. The rise of commodity exchange in urban centers contrasted with the rural natural economy, creating tensions within the feudal system. This conflict, alongside the fragmentation of sovereignty and class unity among the nobility, facilitated the political autonomy of towns during the later Middle Ages.

According to Anderson, medieval agriculture began to stagnate by the mid-13th century as production reached its technical limits. This contradicted earlier Marxist theories that attributed feudalism's decline to external factors. Anderson believed that as productivity plateaued and population growth outpaced agricultural yields, seigniorial

incomes fell. In response, lords resorted to warfare and plunder, further exacerbating labor shortages, especially after waves of pestilence.

To counter declining revenues, lords attempted to reimpose stricter servile conditions, intensifying class conflict. The feudal system's internal contradictions—particularly the division between rural and urban economies—culminated in the collapse of feudalism. Urban centers, viewing runaway serfs as valuable labor for manufacturing, actively supported the conversion of feudal dues into monetary rents, accelerating the decline of serfdom. Ultimately, rather than worsening peasant conditions, the collapse of feudalism led to greater freedom and improved livelihoods for the lower classes.

Despite its insights, Anderson's thesis faced criticism for being overly rigid. Critics argued that his emphasis on 'catastrophic collisions' and class struggle as the primary drivers of feudalism's rise and fall overlooked the broader complexities and variations within feudal societies.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 What according to F.W Maitland were the basic features of feudalism in medieval Europe?
- Q.2 Who proposed the theory of Roman origins of feudalism?
- Q.3 Name the historians who emphasized on the elements of continuity between the Germanic kingdoms and the Roman Empire.
- Q.4 What was Henry Pirenne views regarding the origins of feudalism?
- Q.5 Name the French historian who explained feudalism by exploring the various forms of 'ties between man and man'.
- Q.6 Who wrote the work entitled 'Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism'?
- Q.7 What was Perry Anderson's view regarding the origins of feudalism?
- Q.8 What was feudal mode of production?
- Q.9 What do you understand by extra-economic coercion?
- Q.10 In to how many zones did Anderson divided the typology of feudalism?

12.4 Summary

- The debates surrounding feudalism cover various aspects, including its origins, characteristics, and impacts.
- Early historians like F.W. Maitland, Karl Bucher, and others primarily focused on the legal framework of feudalism, emphasizing elements such as fiefs, vassalage, military obligations, and lordly justice.
- They traced these features back to the traditions of the Germanic kingdoms and the Roman Empire, highlighting their continuity.
- Henry Pirenne argued that the decline of trade in Europe played a significant role in the emergence of feudalism.
- Marc Bloch viewed feudalism through the lens of dependency relationships, asserting that kinship bonds grew stronger as the system evolved.
- Perry Anderson considered feudalism a more advanced system for enhancing agricultural productivity and generating surplus compared to the traditional slave-based economy. He believed it propelled the entire agrarian economy forward.

12.5 Glossary

Latifundia: A very big agricultural estate in the Roman world, generally worked on by slave labour.

Lombard's (Lombardy): One of the Germanic people who were conquerors of Italy.

Manse: A unit of land cultivated by one peasant family's labour, whether it belonged to the lord or the peasant himself. This was the unit of measurement of labour dues.

Mode of Production: A term generally used by the Marxist scholars to refer to the method of producing the necessities of life prevalent at a particular stage which determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life.

Seignior/Lord: Feudal lord, person of high rank in feudal system.

Tenures: Form of right or title under which landed property is held.

12.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 According to F.W Maitland, the basic features of feudalism in medieval Europe were disintegration of political authority, public power in private hands, and a military system in which a vital part of the armed forces was secured by means of

private contracts.

Ans.2 Fusel de Couplings

Ans.3 Henri See, Otto Seek and Alfonse Dopsch.

Ans.4 In Henry Pirenne's view, trade occupied crucial position and he believed that the disruption of trade in Europe greatly contributed to the development of feudalism.

Ans.5 Marc Bloch

Ans.6 Perry Anderson

Ans.7 Perry Anderson asserts that the feudal social formation was borne out of the catastrophic collision of two modes of production i.e. the primitive Germanic tribal system and the ancient Roman Slave mode of production.

Ans.8 The mode of production in which the relations of production were characterized by feudal landlords using political and legal power to extract an economic surplus from an unfree peasantry in the form of feudal rent.

Ans.9 The legalised amalgamation of economic exploitation with political authority is termed as extra-economic coercion.

Ans.10 Three zones

12.7 Suggested Readings

1. Anderson, Perry, Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism, London and New York: Verso Classics, 1974.
2. Bloch, Marc, Feudal Society, Volume I: The Growth of Ties of Dependence, Second Edition, London, 1962
3. Bloch, Marc, Feudal Society, 2 Vols, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.
4. Dev, Arjun, The Story of Civilization: A History Textbook for Class IX, Vol. 1, NCERT Publication, New Delhi, 2009.
5. Farooqui, Amar, Early Social Formations, Manak Publications, New Delhi, 2001.
6. Henri Pirenne, 1939, Mohammad and Charlemagne, New York, 1939.
7. Leo Huberman, Man's Worldly Goods: The Story of the Wealth of Nations, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1936.

12.8 Terminal Questions

1. Discuss the early formulations of feudalism in medieval Europe.

2. What, according to Marc Bloch, were the ties of dependence in feudalism?
3. Examine Perry Anderson's theory regarding feudalism.
4. Give a brief account of the concept of feudalism as a mode of production.

UNIT-13

FEUDALISM IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE-II

Structure

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Objectives

13.3 Forms and Structures

13.3.1 Lord, Vassals and Homage

13.3.2 Types of Fiefs and Tenements

13.3.3 Allods

13.3.4 Manors

13.3.5 Knights, Tournaments and Chivalry

Self-Check Exercise-1

13.4 Summary

13.5 Glossary

13.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

13.7 Suggested Readings

13.8 Terminal Questions

13.1 Introduction

Feudal societies across Europe exhibited significant regional variations in their social and institutional structures, yet some common features can be identified. One aspect was the fragmentation of kingdoms into smaller regions, making political authority a matter of private contract. Another key feature was the establishment of hierarchical relationships based on unequal exchanges of service and protection. Feudal society operated under a strict hierarchy. At the top was the king, who granted fiefs (estates) to lords. These lords, in turn, distributed fiefs to vassals, who fulfilled specific duties. At the base of the hierarchy were knights, responsible for military service. The entire system was bound by strong ties of personal loyalty and allegiance.

13.2 Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the roles and mutual obligations of lords and vassals.
- Identify the types and characteristics of fiefs and tenements.
- Learn about the conditions of cultivators and tenants within a manor.
- Discuss the role of knights in the feudal system.

13.3 Forms and Structures

The evolution of diverse forms, customs, and institutions makes it challenging to present feudalism as a unified system. However, certain core features define its structure.

13.3.1 Lords, Vassals, and Homage

The practice of commendation referred to the formal process by which a free man placed himself under the protection of a more powerful lord, creating mutual obligations. The person seeking protection became a vassal, pledging service and loyalty to his lord, while the lord promised protection and sustenance in return. The ceremony of commendation, known as homage, involved two key elements:

1. **Immixito manuum (Mixing of Hands):** The vassal, kneeling and unarmed, extended his clasped hands to the lord, who grasped them in acceptance.
2. **Volo (Declaration of Intent):** The vassal verbally pledged his loyalty, and the lord accepted this commitment.

During the mid-8th century, the Carolingians introduced the **Oath of Fealty**, where the vassal swore allegiance on a Bible or relics, vowing never to harm the lord and to remain faithful. This oath reinforced the vassal's status as a free man serving by choice. Lords often required vassals to renew their oaths, especially if loyalty was in doubt.

The act of homage and the oath of fealty were lifelong commitments, binding until the death of either party. The ceremony concluded with a symbolic kiss (**osculum**) to mark the establishment of the feudal bond.

Following homage and fealty, the **Act of Investiture** formalized the transfer of a fief from the lord to the vassal. This ceremony involved the lord handing over a symbolic object, such as a staff, glove, or piece of earth, representing the fief itself. From this moment, the vassal gained rights over the fief. In later periods, when a vassal renounced a fief, he returned the original investiture object to the lord.

The vassal's primary duty was loyalty, refraining from any act that might harm the lord's person, property, or honor. His obligations were categorized into two main services:

1. **Aid (Auxilium):** Primarily military service, requiring the vassal to provide soldiers, including his own sub-vassals. Additional duties included administrative tasks, carrying messages, serving as an escort, and offering financial support. Common instances for aid included the lord's ransom, the knighting of his eldest son, the marriage of his eldest daughter, and the lord's departure on a crusade.
2. **Counsel (Consilium):** This involved attending imperial assemblies (hofstage) and advising the lord. Vassals also participated in judicial matters, presiding over cases in the lord's court.

In return, the lord was responsible for the **protection and maintenance** of his vassals. Protection entailed defending the vassal from enemies and ensuring the secure possession of the fief. Maintenance could be provided either by offering a place in the lord's household or through the grant of a benefice (fief). By the 11th century, most vassals held benefices rather than relying solely on domestic support.

Since the bond between lord and vassal was personal, it did not extend to sub-vassals. While a vassal might bring his own vassals into the lord's service, these sub-vassals had no direct obligations to the lord. However, if a lord died without an heir, his

vassals temporarily became the vassals of his superior lord until a rightful heir was recognized.

Theoretically, sanctions existed for breaches of obligation, but until the 12th and 13th centuries, enforcement was weak. Disputes were often resolved through armed conflict. Violating fealty could result in the confiscation of the fief, though this became difficult as vassals' rights over their fiefs strengthened over time.

13.3.2 Evolution and Types of Fiefs

The leader of a group of lords had two choices regarding vassals: he could either keep them in his household and meet their needs or grant them an estate or a steady income from land, enabling them to sustain themselves. This grant of land or income, known as a fief or benefice, was meant to support the vassal while ensuring he could fulfill his obligations under the vassalage contract. The older form of vassalage involved household vassals, but from the Carolingian period onward, the distribution of benefices increased significantly. This shift occurred because it became challenging for lords to sustain a large group of dependents, while many vassals desired independent revenue sources that aligned with their existing political authority and social standing. Additionally, a *vassus dominicus* often had to spend most of his time in his province, overseeing administrative duties.

A fief usually comprised land but could also involve specific rights or duties, such as toll collection, market dues, minting rights, judicial functions, and roles like advocate, mayor, provost, or receiver. Fiefs not tied to land but associated with regular payments were called "money fiefs," commonly found in France, Germany, and the Low Countries from the 11th century onward. The Norman and Angevin monarchies in England utilized these money fiefs most extensively and systematically. In the 10th and 11th centuries, many lay vassals also controlled churches—abbeys, parish churches, and chapels—which provided income from tithes, church endowments, and, in some cases, even the proceeds from spiritual offices.

The rights of lords and vassals evolved significantly over time due to processes like patrimonialization and subinfeudation. Initially, under feudalism, the lord retained tenure rights based on Roman law, while the vassal had usufruct rights—the right to use and benefit from the fief without ownership. However, from the 9th century onward, the continuous occupation of the fief strengthened the vassal's control, weakening the lord's authority. Fiefs gradually became hereditary possessions rather than life tenures. While the death of a vassal originally ended the enfeoffment and restored the lord's rights, heirs increasingly occupied the fief without formal investiture. By the end of the 12th century, hereditary succession of fiefs became legally recognized across most of Europe.

Before the hereditary practice was established, a lord could demand a payment, known as "relief," from an aspirant before granting fealty and investiture. The amount of relief varied depending on the value of the fief, though ecclesiastical tenements were exempt from such exaction's. If a minor inherited a fief, either a close relative became the vassal responsible for the heir's maintenance and education, or the lord temporarily controlled the fief while ensuring the minor's support. Upon reaching adulthood, the heir could claim the fief through investiture. Initially, women were excluded from feudal inheritance, but by the late 10th century, many females, especially in southern France, the Low Countries, and Germany, began to inherit fiefs.

The patrimonialization of fiefs accelerated subinfeudation—the process of vassals granting portions of their fiefs to sub-vassals. According to Ganshof, as vassals viewed fiefs as part of their wealth, they naturally wanted all their children to benefit. Consequently, the division of fiefs became common in France and Germany, although England adhered to male primogeniture. Alongside indivisibility, the principle of inalienability also weakened, as property rights became more prominent in feudal relationships. Personal services were increasingly replaced by obligations tied to alienable property, which could be sold to the highest bidder. Initially, vassals needed their lord's consent to subdivide or sell their fiefs. However, from the 10th century in France, the 11th century in Germany, and after the Norman Conquest in England, vassals could freely transfer fiefs without the lord's approval. The complex customs of

resignation and re-investiture were gradually abandoned, although lords retained the right to collect a fee during changes in ownership and exercised pre-emption rights. Ultimately, vassals gained more control over fiefs than their lords.

Multiple vassalage emerged in the late 9th century, allowing vassals to pledge allegiance to multiple lords, especially in 10th- and 11th-century France and Germany. To maintain dependency ties, the system of ligancy was introduced, particularly in France, England, southern Italy, and parts of Germany by the late 11th century. Under this system, a vassal identified one primary lord—the liege lord—who provided the largest benefice and was owed the most stringent service. Over time, even liege homage became more complex, with vassals pledging allegiance to multiple liege lords.

Service obligations associated with fiefs involved professional specialization and individual action, contrasting with villein tenements, which required labor services and in-kind rents. Villein tenements typically ranged from ten to thirty acres and were spread across scattered strips within the manor's open fields. Although technically owned by the lord, local customs protected villein tenures, subjecting them to quasi-legal inheritance rules and regular tax payments.

13.3.3 Allods

While villein tenements and fiefs dominated landholding patterns, allods represented another form of ownership. Allodial rights entailed full ownership without service or payment obligations. Although feudal tenure expanded at the expense of allodial rights from the 10th century onward, allods persisted in southern France and Germany. Historian Marc Bloch noted that countries importing feudalism developed it more systematically than those where it evolved from local customs. As a result, allods were absent in Syria and England, where all land belonged to a lord, extending up to the king. However, in much of Europe, independent peasant holdings were common, though they did not escape economic exploitation by the seigniorial class, who controlled local markets and economies. Frequently, allodial holders had to pay levies

directly or indirectly through intermediaries. Consequently, the unstable nature of feudalism left their small-scale economies vulnerable.

13.3.4 Manors

In the feudal system, the manor served as the core unit of both economic production and social organization. It comprised a group of small dependent farms under the control of a lord and cultivated by serfs or peasant farmers bound to the land. The concept of the manor originated from the Roman colonate or villae. However, the consolidation of power within the manor system, driven by the fusion of various tenures and the transfer of allodial lands to influential individuals, emerged alongside the development of feudal relationships. Manors expanded through both conquest and contractual agreements.

These estates were relatively small, surrounded by extensive forests and wastelands. A typical manor included peasant households clustered around essential facilities such as a church, a grist and stone mill, a blacksmith shop, a winepress, and a bakery. Most daily necessities were produced within the manor, though some goods had to be procured from outside to meet the lord's needs. Villages were usually located centrally amid the arable land. Peasants lived, worked, and died within the lord's estate and were typically buried in the village churchyard. The manor essentially defined the medieval peasant's world and experience.

Feudal lords resided in fortified castles or large manor houses, contrasting with the simple cruck houses of peasants. To protect and expand their territories, lords often engaged in minor arms races with neighboring lords. Wars were fought for conquest and plunder, with attackers relying on surprise and mobility, while defenders secured wealth and people in fortified locations. Military campaigns usually occurred before harvest time, and ravaging the countryside was a common strategy to weaken opponents. During the High Middle Ages, significant advancements were made in fortification construction. When attacked, peasants often sought refuge within the manor's castle.

The manor itself comprised cultivable fields, meadowlands, and wastelands. Farmland was typically divided into strips, worked collectively by peasants. Crops and individual peasant holdings were scattered across different fields, while the surrounding areas featured open fields, forests, and wastelands. The commons, a significant portion of land, was accessible to all villagers.

The manorial population primarily consisted of servile peasants of various backgrounds. The term 'serf' referred to the lowest social class. Serfs were tied to the land, unable to own property, move freely, buy or sell goods, marry without the lord's permission, or bequeath property to heirs. Feudal serfdom evolved partly from ancient slavery and the Roman practice of allotting land (*mansi*) to slaves in exchange for agricultural tithes, labor on the lord's fields, and other dues. Lords also used social protection and judicial control to reduce free peasants to hereditary serfdom. While some peasants surrendered their freedom due to invasions and poor harvests, coercion from lords was the primary driver of their subjugation. Historian David Whitten observed that the most rapid peasant subjugation occurred in the 11th century, following improvements in agricultural productivity.

Serfs were obligated to perform various tasks for their lord. Each villein household had to provide a laborer, oxen, and a plough for the lord's farm for about half the week. They also engaged in tasks like maintaining hedges, ditches, and roads, threshing grain, and tending livestock. During harvest times, their workload increased significantly. Serfs required the lord's consent and had to pay a fee to marry. Lords could even choose spouses for their serfs. Additionally, serfs were subject to numerous taxes, including the head tax (a levy on existence), the *taille* (a property tax), and the *heriot* (an inheritance tax). They also paid *banalities*—fees for using the lord's mills, ovens, and presses—and provided the clergy with hens, eggs, wax, and other goods, along with regular tithes.

Alongside serfs, manors included freeholders—tenants who held land under fixed rents or specified services. Although their obligations were demanding, they were exempt from the general rural labor required of villeins. Freeholders enjoyed certain

legal protections and could seek redress in royal courts, granting them a privileged position regarding holdings, dues, and services. They participated in the management of the manorial community but had to comply with communal decisions. They could not use their plots independently and faced fines for breaking village rules. Both villeins and freeholders shared the responsibility of framing village by-laws and establishing economic practices.

Over time, the manorial economy necessitated the emergence of a specialized managerial class drawn from both villeins and freeholders. This staff included stewards and seneschals, who supervised manorial courts, maintained accounts, and represented the lord. To protect tenants from exploitation by intermediaries, lords formalized customary practices regarding holdings and services from the 12th century onward. This system safeguarded both tenants' rights and the lord's interests while reflecting the increasing stratification within the peasant class.

13.3.5 Knights, Tournaments, and Chivalry

In the feudal hierarchy, knights were elite, specially trained mounted warriors who served their lords. Their value lay in their role as formidable defenders during times of external threats and internal conflicts. Knights garrisoned castles, enforced dues from peasants, and played a crucial role in military campaigns. Their social standing far exceeded that of their Roman predecessors, the equites.

Initially, knighthood was conferred based on battlefield merit, with any knight able to knight another. However, the process became more structured over time. Sons of nobles destined for knighthood began training at around age seven. They were sent to another lord's castle, where they were educated alongside other noble children. At this stage, the boy became a page, learning basic literacy, languages, music, and poetry, alongside developing good manners—a hallmark of knighthood. However, physical training was paramount. At fourteen, he became a squire, assisting a knight and learning to wield weapons, ride horses, swim, hunt, and endure hardships. Squires cared for their knight's horses, armor, and weapons, often accompanying them into

battle and managing prisoners. After proving their worth in combat, squires were formally knighted through an elaborate religious ceremony.

By the late 10th century, tournaments became popular among knights, alongside hunting. These events provided opportunities to practice combat skills and demonstrate prowess. Tournaments also settled disputes, as participants sought divine favor for victory. The primary tournament format involved group combat, while jousting—single combat between mounted knights—gained popularity. Fights typically took place within enclosed areas before an audience. Participants were not always enemies; knights often competed to honor their sovereign or a lady. Only knights of noble descent and unblemished reputations could participate. Those who had fled battle, engaged in trade, broken oaths, or harmed women were barred.

Victorious knights claimed their opponent's armor, weapons, and horse and could demand ransom. Early tournaments used real battlefield weaponry, leading to frequent injuries and deaths. As concerns about casualties and political conspiracies grew, rulers and the Church attempted to regulate tournaments. The Church even threatened to deny Christian burial to knights killed in tournaments. However, these events had become so popular that prohibitions failed. Instead, authorities implemented controls. For instance, Richard I of England introduced a licensing system in 1192 CE. Safer practices, such as blunt-tipped lances, tilt barriers, and more protective armor, were also adopted. Jousting increasingly became the preferred form of combat practice.

Tournaments played a significant role in shaping the knightly code of conduct known as chivalry. Derived from the French word *cheval* (horse), chivalry initially referred to mounted warriors but evolved to embody ideals of bravery, courtesy, generosity, and loyalty. Knights were expected to defend their lords, fight honorably, and never strike an unarmed opponent. They had to keep their word, protect the weak, and treat prisoners with respect. As the Church promoted the Crusades, religious devotion and the defense of Christianity became integral to chivalric values.

Chivalry refined the behavior of feudal lords but remained limited to interactions within the knightly class. Knights treated peers with courtesy but often displayed rudeness toward commoners. They were also expected to champion women's rights and protect those in distress, though each knight typically chose a specific lady as the focus of his devotion. Knights fought both in battle and tournaments to uphold their lady's honor.

However, chivalry was more of an idealized code than a reflection of reality. With the advent of firearms in the 13th century, cavalry, knightly armor, and traditional weapons lost their military significance. As commercial and urban cultures expanded, knighthood became increasingly obsolete. In polite society, the ideals of chivalry gradually transformed into the code of gentlemanly behavior.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 Define commendation.
- Q.2 What was homage?
- Q.3 What do you understand by the term fief?
- Q.4 What were money fiefs?
- Q.5 What were Allods or allodia lands?
- Q.6 What was oath of fealty?
- Q.7 Who was serf?
- Q.8 Who was knight in feudal system?
- Q.9 Define joust.
- Q.10 What was chivalry?

13.4 Summary

- Feudalism did not follow a uniform structure across Europe, showing considerable regional variations.
- The feudal system was built on a series of obligations among lords, vassals, and peasants. A lord granted land, known as a fief, to a vassal in exchange for services.

- The relationship between a lord and a vassal was formalized through a contract, where loyalty and homage to the lord were central principles.
- Fiefs varied in size and form, including land, public authority, or specific rights and duties.
- Clear rules governed the inheritance of fiefs, defining the powers of lords over these lands.
- Within the manor, peasants were stratified, with some enjoying limited rights while others faced complete subjugation.
- Cultivators were burdened with heavy land taxes and various other dues.
- The rise of knights stemmed from the need for armed protection of manors and suppression of internal conflicts.
- Tournaments played a crucial role in shaping the chivalric code, which outlined the ideal behavior for medieval knights.

13.5 Glossary

- **Accolade:** The ceremonial act of conferring knighthood.
- **Enfeoffment:** The process of granting land or a fief under the feudal system.
- **Low Countries:** Refers to modern-day Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.
- **Right of Pre-emption:** The lord's right to buy back a fief by reimbursing the purchaser.
- **Sceptre:** A staff symbolizing personal sovereignty or imperial authority.
- **Tithe:** A tax, typically one-tenth of annual agricultural produce, paid to the Church.
- **Wand:** A slender rod used as a symbol or for ceremonial purposes.
- **Vassus Dominicus:** A senior vassal with significant responsibilities.

13.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

1. The legal arrangement through which a free man placed himself under the protection of a powerful lord was called commendation.
2. The ceremony of commendation was known as homage.

3. The land tenure provided by a lord to a vassal for sustenance and fulfilling vassalage duties was called a fief or benefice.
4. Money fiefs referred to payments made at regular intervals, without any associated land.
5. An allod was an estate owned outright, with full rights of ownership and alienation.
6. Fealty was an oath of loyalty where a vassal pledged not to harm the lord or his property.
7. A serf was a medieval agricultural laborer bound to work on a lord's estate while being entitled to protection.
8. A knight was a mounted warrior serving a lord under the feudal system.
9. Joust was a medieval contest where two horsemen fought with lances.
10. Chivalry described the code of conduct followed by knights, emphasizing honor, valor, courtesy, and loyalty.

13.7 Suggested Readings

1. Anderson, Perry. *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*. Verso, 1996.
2. Bloch, Marc. *Feudal Society*, trans. L.A. Manyon. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
3. Davenport, John. *The Age of Feudalism (World History)*. Lucent Books, 2007.
4. Ganshof, François Louis. *Feudalism*. Longmans, 1952.
5. Poly, Jean-Pierre and Bournazel, Eric. *The Feudal Transformation, 900–1200*, trans. Caroline Higgitt. Holmes and Meier, 1991.
6. Reynolds, Susan. *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

13.8 Terminal Questions

1. Discuss the rights and responsibilities of lords and vassals within the feudal structure.
2. What was the nature of a fief? How was it inherited, and how did its structure evolve?

3. Write a brief note on Allods.
4. Analyze the conditions faced by different types of cultivators within a manor.
5. Who were knights, and what role did they play in the feudal system?

UNIT-14

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MANORIAL SYSTEM

Structure

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Objectives

14.3 The Manorial System

14.3.1 Manorial Agriculture

14.3.2 Residents of the Manor

14.3.3 Advantages of Manorial System

14.3.4 Disadvantages of Manorial System

Self-Check Exercise-1

14.4 Decline of Manorial System

14.5 Summary

14.6 Glossary

14.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

14.8 Suggested Readings

14.9 Terminal Questions

14.1 Introduction

The Manor System played a significant role in medieval society. During the Middle Ages, European society was primarily structured around feudalism, with the Manor System serving as a crucial element, especially in Western Europe. Its origins can be traced back to the villa system of the Roman Empire. Although the Western Roman Empire collapsed in the 5th century, the villa system continued to exist and eventually evolved into what became known as Manorialism.

Manorialism was a system of landholding where a feudal lord managed a manor, which included farmland, woodlands, and villages. The land was primarily for the lord's use, while the surrounding villages housed serfs, who worked the land as tenants under the lord's authority. The main purpose of the Manor System was to organize society and ensure agricultural production.

The Manor System eventually declined as European society underwent significant transformations during the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. It was replaced by capitalism, which emphasized private property and economic freedom, principles popularized by Adam Smith in the 18th century.

14.2 Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the concept of the Manor System.
- Learn about manorial agriculture.
- Explain the benefits of the Manor System.
- Identify the drawbacks of Manorial-ism.
- Analyze the factors that led to its decline.

14.3 The Manorial System

In Western and Central Europe, most farmland was divided into units called manors. A manor was a large estate owned by a lord, where common people worked the land and serfs paid the lord for land use and protection. While manors varied in size, organization, and social structure across regions, their core features remained largely consistent.

Every manor had a lord, reflecting the feudal principle: “No lord without land, no land without a lord.” The manor lord was considered a tenant rather than the absolute owner, as he held the land from a superior lord. Only the king possessed absolute ownership.

The hierarchy of landholding was structured as follows:

- The serf held land from the manor lord.
- The manor lord held the land from a count.
- The count held the land from a duke.
- The duke held the land from the king.

The lord, whether holding the manor directly from the king or through another lord, enjoyed secure ownership and could not be dispossessed unless he committed treason.



Plan of Medieval Manor

Source:https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6b/Plan_mediaeval_manor.jpg

pg

There was the manorial village in the centre of the manor which dominated by a castle or manor house. This was much more firmly constructed as compared to the cottages of the commoners. The manor house was always fortified. The lord of the manor resided in this house with his family, servants and officials who managed his estate. The dwellings of the serfs were clustered together for safety a short distance away from the manor house. These were mud or wooden huts roofed with thatch having only one or two rooms. If there were two rooms, the main room was utilized for cooking, eating and other household activities. The second was the family bedroom. Whereas the manor house was of more than one story containing many rooms. There was a well

or fountain somewhere within the village where people fetched their water. To keep out the marauders, there was a stone wall with heavy gates of wood reinforced with iron around the whole village, which were closed at night to keep out plunderers.

The manorial system was based on self-sufficiency. The serfs and peasants raised or produced nearly everything that they and their lord required for daily life such as crops, milk, cheese, fuel, cloth, leather etc. Salt, iron, and a few uncommon objects like millstones were the only outside purchases. However, complete self-sufficiency was never accomplished. It remained an unachievable ideal, however, reduction of external trade to a minimum was considered as a symbol of good management. Natural economy was prevalent on a medieval manor. Goods were exchanged for goods. There was hardly any use of money in manorial transactions.

14.3.1 Manorial Agriculture

The land of the manor extended out from the village and included forests, pastures, meadow's waste and cultivable fields. All except cultivable land were used in common. Since tillage was the principal economic activity of the people, the cultivable land was of great significance. It was divided into two parts. One part usually about one-third of the whole, belonged to the lord and was called his **demesne**. The other part belonged to the tenants who actually worked on the land. An interesting feature of the manorial system was that the land of every farmer was not all in one place, but was scattered into small strips intermingled with the others. No fences existed on the great cultivable fields. The strips were marked off by a row of stones or a grass balk of the width of a furrow left unploughed. Strip farming was the characteristic feature of the feudal period. This arrangement was generally known as the "**open field system**".

Initially, the manorial agriculture was carried on under the open field system which finally gave place to the three field system. Under the two field system the cultivable land was divided into two parts, one of which would be sowed and the other left to lie fallow to recover its fertility. Under the three field system, the cultivated land of the manor was divided into three large fields for growing grain. Only two of the three fields were planted each year and the third field was left fallow, or unplanted, to enable it to regain its fertility. The peasants were aware of the fact that planting the same crop each year in the same place was not good for the soil. So every year, they moved their

crops from one field to the other. One year the food crops such as wheat or rye might be cultivated in one field, alongside barley or oats in the second field and the third field would be kept fallow.

The yield was poor as it never averaged more than six to eight bushels per acre. The type of crop to be grown and the time of reaping were fixed by custom, to which all strip holders were expected to follow.

14.3.2 Residents of the Manor

The residents of the manor may be classified as free and unfree. The free comprised the lord of the manor himself, his bailiff, the village priest, and many other free men. The free men were independent landlords and had never owed labour services, but simply paid a tax to their overlord. However, the unfree were the economically important class as they provided nearly all the labour supply of the manor.

A majority of peasants on a manor were serfs who were tied to the land. They could not leave the land without the permission of the lord. The peasants lived in cruck houses. In these type of houses wattle and daub was plastered on the wooden frame. This was a mixture of mud, straw and manure. The straw provided insulation to the wall and the manure bounded the entire mixture thereby providing it the necessary strength. The roofs were thatched. Long time spent by peasants doing backbreaking work on his scattered fields made their daily life very hard. Thus, they managed to earn a miserable living from the soil. They worked on the land owned by the lords as well as on their own holdings. The peasants were forced to work two or three days each week on the lord's land without pay. Sometimes during the busy season in the year they were called up on to do additional work known as **boon work**. The lord's demesne had to be ploughed first, sowed first, and reaped first. Apart from this, the serfs were bound to deliver to his lord some of the produce of his own land, may be fish or honey, or a lamb in spring, a pig in the late fall, a duck at Christmas and eggs at Easter. They were also subject to additional payments upon special occasions. When he gave a daughter in marriage, he was supposed to make a payment in goods or money. When the lord was in great need, as for example during the time of war, the serf had to pay an amount determined randomly by the lord and hence subject to considerable abuse. The serf had to pay fees for the use of the lords' gristmill, drink making equipment and bakery. In the event of

death of a serf, his heirs had to deliver their best animal or some other subject of value to the lord and if a serf died without direct heirs, the lord confiscated his property. The peasant had also to pay a tithe to the church, which was 10 % of the value of what he produced. The peasants were not mere slaves. Most of the tenants were called 'serfs' from the Latin word 'servos' which means "a slave". Where the slave could be bought or sold anywhere, anytime, the serf could not be sold away from the land. If the land was granted to a new lord, the serfs became the tenants of the new lord.



Serfs Working in Fields

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Reeve_and_Serfs.jpg

Although the serf was ill-treated, he had his family and a home and some land. He also secured help from the lord during the times of famine and other calamities. There were many degrees of serfdom. These were "demesne serfs" who were permanently attached to the lord's house and worked in his fields. Poor peasants known as "bordars" held small-holdings at the edge of the village and "cotters" occupying only a cottage. Then there were "villeins" who occupied a social space between a free peasant and a slave. Most of the medieval European peasants were villeins. Some villeins were exempt from "boon work" and gave only the regular labour services. Others

gave no services at all, but paid the lord a part of their produce. Still others gave no services, but made payments in money in its place. Some villeins were almost as prosperous as free men.

14.3.3 Advantages of Manorial System

The advantages of manorial system are considerable. It protected the civilization from the attacks of barbarians. It provided for defence at a time when the king was unable to protect the people. The manorial system was worthily suited in the middle Ages. The manorial people enjoyed some amount of security. They were not liable to the misfortunes which sometimes affect the welfare of the working man today. There was no fear of unemployment. Neither old age nor sickness was to them an economic disaster.

Manorial system led to social harmony on the basis of faithfulness. The society was bound together by mutual obligations, loyalty and service. The lord depended on his vassal, who in sequence depended on the lord. It encouraged co-operation in farming activities. It provided solidarity to the peasant society. The feudal society was similar to “mutual insurance society”.

It resolved the economic problems of the society by providing for agricultural production and the making of different kinds of commodities. Though the serfs had to work hard they enjoyed sufficient leisure. They had the time for play and recreation. It was not to the lord's interest to oppress his serfs. By keeping crop-lands, animals and implements mainly private, the medieval manor avoided some of the most obvious external dis-economies of primitive communism.

14.3.4 Disadvantages of Manorial System

Under the manorial system of cultivation there was hardly any scope for initiative and innovation. Communal cultivation, controlled by tradition, prevented intelligent and innovative men from making experiments. Farmers could not introduce new crops into the rotation without the consent of entire village, because all crops had to be harvested simultaneously. Scientific breeding of livestock could not advance with the promiscuous intermingling of everybody's animals, and animal diseases spread rapidly. When farmers attempted to expand their territory by stealing a furrow from their neighbour there were bitter disputes and litigations. The manorial system caused a lot of wastage

of time. Strip farming caused the villagers to waste much time walking from strip to strip. Manorial system of cultivation was less productive. Under this system, scientific cultivation was impossible. Weeds thrived and scattered the seeds from the uncultivated boundaries and good drainage was not possible. Sub-standard agricultural implements and inefficient cattle and the very limited use of manure resulted in low productivity.

Manorial system of cultivation led to extreme inequality between the serfs and the lords. The serf worked the land and the lord worked the serf. In so far as the lord was concerned there was not much difference between the serf and any of the livestock on his demesne.

The living standards of the peasants were very poor. Men and the women had to labour for a very long time in the fields. They resided in unhealthy surroundings. The quality of the food they consumed was poor. They rarely ate meat because they required animals to aid them in their fields. The common people and the serfs were exploited by the selfish barons in the times of peace and in war.

Due to manorial system, the society became stagnant instead of progressive and dynamic. The manor was a small world in itself in which the people took birth and died without any knowledge about the outside world.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 Define Manorialism.
- Q.2 What was demesne?
- Q.3 What do you understand by open-field system?
- Q.4 What was boon work?
- Q.5 Who were Villeins?
- Q.6 Give any one advantage of the Manorial System.
- Q.7 What was the disadvantage of Manorial System?
- Q.8 What was the impact of Manorial System on the society?

14.4 Decline of the Manorial System

Several factors contributed to the decline of the manorial system. One major cause was the Crusades, the series of religious wars between Christians and Muslims. These conflicts significantly weakened the nobility, as many nobles lost both their lives

and wealth. Those who survived returned impoverished and often resorted to selling their feudal rights.

Advancements in agriculture, industry, transportation, and communication further undermined the system. These innovations sparked a commercial revolution, leading to increased trade and large-scale production aimed at markets rather than local consumption, thus eroding the foundation of manorialism.

The rise of towns also dealt a significant blow to the manorial structure. Many serfs gained their freedom by paying substantial sums to obtain charters of rights. Towns provided an escape from baronial control, as serfs could find refuge in rapidly expanding urban centers focused on commerce and industry. According to tradition, if a serf managed to live in a town undetected for one year and one day, they were granted freedom. Many successfully escaped and avoided detection for the required period.

Additionally, new agricultural lands were brought under cultivation, creating favorable conditions for laborers. Serfs willing to work on these lands for a year and a day were often granted freedom.

The emergence of nation-states also shifted military power and defense responsibilities from feudal lords to monarchs. Kings maintained professional armies, reducing the need for the protection traditionally provided by lords. Furthermore, technological improvements in farming tools and implements made peasants more self-reliant.

The rise of the middle class further weakened the manorial system. This emerging class opposed the exploitative practices of feudal barons and often supported the king in diminishing noble power.

Another significant factor was the enclosure movement. As the population grew, villeins sought permission from lords to cultivate portions of wasteland. Lords agreed, charging monetary rent for these plots. Instead of cultivating scattered strips, villeins

began farming compact blocks of 5 to 10 acres. This system increased agricultural efficiency and allowed farmers to sell surplus produce in nearby towns.

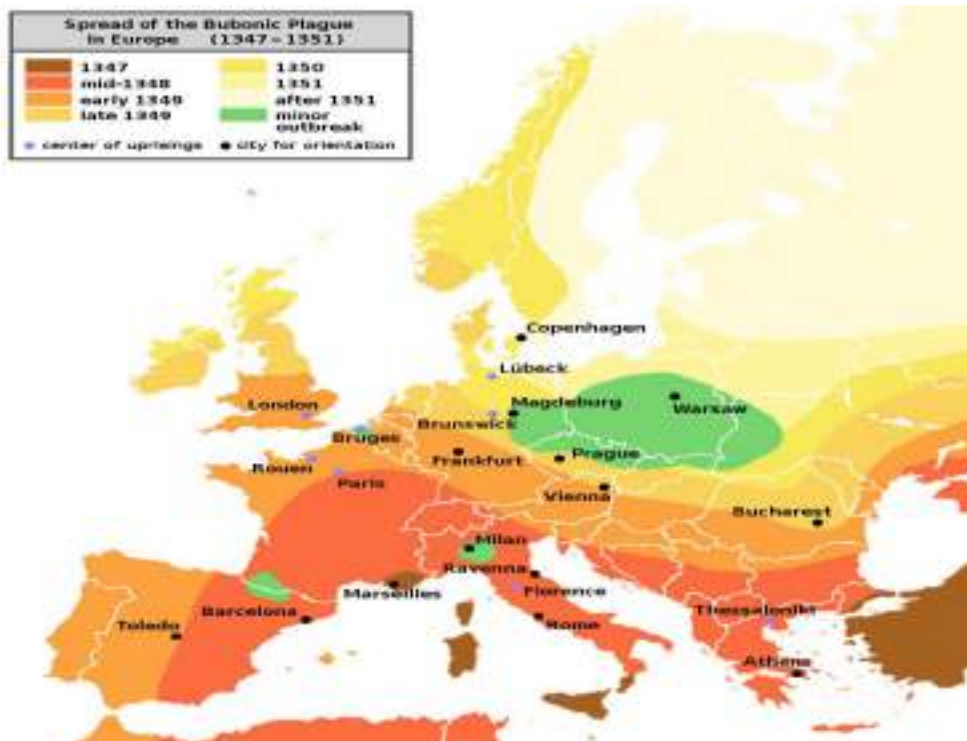
Ultimately, these combined social, economic, and political changes led to the gradual dissolution of the manorial system.

The lord needed money to purchase the goods that only the merchants could supply. As a result he began to convert or commute his serf's obligation into money. This meant that many serfs made payment to their lord instead of labour, or paid a fee to be absolved from some of the labour or even bought their freedom. The peasants toiled in the fields and collected money with which he could buy off some of his labour services to his lord. This development proved to be a milestone in the decline of serfdom. Also, with the passage of time, the lords were required to pay their-own taxes in money and the need for increase in their money incomes was quite understandable. Generally, the week-work was commuted first, but later on the boon work was also counted in. Villeins who commuted were made independent from the unpleasant part of their villeinage. The lords also learned from experience that free labour was more fruitful than unfree labour. These changes have occurred very slowly, however, they had a tremendous impact. Commutation aided in a considerable increase in production. It also reduced frictions in society and reduced wastage of time and energy too.

The role played by money became extensive. It gained importance as a store of value. This affected fundamental relations. A number of lords were keen to free many of their serfs for some price. Lords having good land could earn a handsome profit by selling freedom to their serfs, renting the land and certain implements out to them and living off the proceeds.

The position of lords in the society weakened as he faced a deteriorating labour market. The increase in power and wealth of the towns tempted progressively more serfs to run away and made it difficult for their former lords to recapture them. On top of this arrived the Bubonic Plague or Black Death of 1347 CE which rapidly spread throughout Europe wiping out more than one third of Europe's population. Labour shortage had put the agricultural workers in strong position and had given them a sense of their power. They demanded higher wages. The villeins and the cotters who had

commuted could benefit from increase in wages. Those who had not commuted clamoured for commutation of their services. However, the lords preferred to keep the villeins in their services and even attempted to make them work harder than before. This caused much disputes between the lords and villeins. Gradually the lords were compelled to grant them commutation. Thus by the beginning of the 16th century, villeinage had completely gone and there was emergence of a free peasantry.



Map of Spread of Bubonic Plague or Black Death of 1347 CE

Source:https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dc/Bubonic_plague_map.PNG

The collapse of feudalism and the establishment of new production relations represented by capitalism were not accomplished without bloody revolution. Due to increasing exploitation and coercion of the serfs by feudal lords there were a number of revolts of the peasants against them. During the feudal period a large number of peasant uprisings against the landlords occurred in several European countries such as England, France, Germany and Russia. However, these uprisings were suppressed mercilessly by the landlords as they controlled the government. But these uprisings

shook the foundations of Man-oratism and ultimately led to its fall.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Q.1 Write any two causes for the decline of Man-oratism.

Q.2 How the rise of towns did was responsible for the decline of Manor System?

14.5 Summary

- The Manor System was an important feature of society in the middle Ages. It was vital to the overall Feudal System, particularly in Western Europe where it is best associated.
- In Western and Central Europe most of the farm land was divided into areas known as 'manors' .
- Man-oratism was a system of landholding in which a feudal lord lived in and managed a country home (manor) with attached farm land, woodlands and villages.
- The land was for the use of the lord of the manor with surrounding homes in the farmland and villages that contained spaces for serfs who were tenants to the lord of the manor. Organizing society and creating agricultural goods was the purpose of the Manor System.
- The manorial system was based on self-sufficiency. The serfs and peasants raised or produced nearly everything that they and their lord required for daily life.
- The land of the manor extended out from the village and included forests, pastures, meadow's waste and cultivable fields.
- Land was divided into two parts. One part usually about one-third of the whole, belonged to the lord and was called his demesne. The other part belonged to the tenants who actually worked on the land.
- Strip farming was the characteristic feature of the feudal period. This arrangement was generally known as the "open field system". This system finally gave place to the three field system.
- The residents of the manor may be classified as free and unfreeze. The free comprised the lord of the manor himself, his bailiff, the village priest, and many other free men. The unfreeze were the economically important class as they provided nearly all the labour supply of the manor.

- A majority of peasants on a manor were serfs who were tied to the land. They resided in cruck houses. Sometimes during the busy season in the year they were called up on to do additional work known as boon work.
- Although the serf was ill-treated, he had his family and a home and some land. He also secured help from the lord during the times of famine and other calamities.
- There were many degrees of serfdom. There were demesne serfs, bordars, cottars and villeins.
- The advantages of manorial system are considerable. It protected the civilization from the attacks of barbarians. It led to social harmony on the basis of faithfulness. It resolved the economic problems of the society by providing for agricultural production and the making of different kinds of commodities.
- Under the manorial system of cultivation there was hardly any scope for initiative and innovation. This system led to extreme inequality between the serfs and the lords.
- Under manorial system, the living standards of the peasants were very poor. Men and the women had to labor for a very long time in the fields.
- Due to manorial system, the society became stagnant instead of progressive and dynamic.
- A number of factors have been attributed for the decline of manor system. The Crusades or the Holy Wars between the Muslims and Christians greatly contributed to the decline of manorial system.
- The growth of nation states witnessed a change in military power and responsibility for defence from lords to kings which led to decline of manorial system. The manorial system was also weakened due to the rise of the middle class.
- The enclosure movement also one of the factors for the decline of the manorial system. Commutation aided in a considerable increase in production. It also reduced frictions in society and reduced wastage of time and energy too.
- Increasing role of money also caused decline of feudalism. Lords having good land could earn a handsome profit by selling freedom to their serfs.

- The Bubonic Plague or Black Death of 1347 CE wiped out one-third of Europe's population leading to decline of manorial system.
- Due to increasing exploitation and coercion of the serfs by feudal lords there were a number of revolts of the peasants against them which led to decline of Man-oralism.

14.6 Glossary

Bailiff: A free man appointed by the lord to direct agricultural work on the demesne.

Commutation: Conversion of the value of labour services into a monetary payment.

Easter: It is a Christian holiday that celebrates the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Meadow: A meadow is an open habitat, or field, vegetated by grasses, herbs, and other non-woody plants.

Strip cropping: Strip cropping is a method of farming which comprises cultivating a field divided into long, narrow strips which are alternated in a crop rotation system.

14.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Man-oralism, also known as the manor system or manorial system, was the method of land ownership in parts of Europe, especially England, during the Middle Ages.

Ans.2 A piece of land attached to a manor and retained by the owner for their own use is called as demesne.

Ans.3 Open-field system was the traditional medieval system of farming, in which land was divided into strips and cultivated by an individual only in the growing season, being available to the community for grazing animals during the rest of the year.

Ans.4 A manorial duty of the peasants when they were called to do additional work in busy season as ploughing and harvesting was called as boon work.

Ans.5 A villain was the most common type of serf in the middle Ages. They had more rights and a higher status than the lowest serf, but existed under a number of legal restrictions that distinguished them from freemen.

Ans.6 It provided for defence at a time when the king was unable to protect the

people.

Ans.7 Farmers could not introduce new crops into the rotation without the consent of entire village, because all crops had to be harvested simultaneously.

Ans.8 Due to manorial system, the society became stagnant instead of progressive and dynamic. The manor was a small world in itself in which the people took birth and died without any knowledge about the outside world.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Ans.1 Crusades and Black Death.

Ans.2 The serfs who wanted to leave job could pay a large sum of money for their freedom from baronial control and take refuge in the rapidly growing towns where life was based on commerce and industry.

14.8 Suggested Readings

1. Bloch, Marc, Feudal Society: Vol 1: The Growth and Ties of Dependence (2 ed.), Routledge, 1989.
2. Bloch, Marc, Feudal Society: Vol 2: Social Classes and Political Organization (2 ed.), Routledge, 1989.
3. Boissonnade, Prosper; Eileen Power; Lynn White, Life and Work in Medieval Europe : The Evolution of Medieval Economy from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Century, Harper Torchbook, 1141. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1964.
4. Chaudhury, K.C, The Middle Ages, New Central Book Agency, Calcutta, 2021.
5. Cipolla, Carlo M (ed.), The Fontana Economic History of Europe, Volume I: The Middle Ages, Glasgow, 1972.
6. Pirenne, Henri, Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1937.

14.9 Terminal Questions

1. Discuss the Manorial System in detail.
2. Write a note on Manorial Agriculture.

3. Give an account of the residents of the Manor.
4. What were the advantages of Manorial System?
5. Discuss the various disadvantages of the Man oralism.
6. Elucidate the causes for the fall of Manorial System.

UNIT -15

STATE, SOCIETY AND RELIGION IN THE LATE MEDIEVAL CHINA

Structure

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Objectives
- 15.3 The Chinese State
 - 15.3.1 Society
 - 15.3.2 Religion
- Self-Check Exercise-1
- 15.4 Summary
- 15.5 Glossary
- 15.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise
- 15.7 Suggested Readings
- 15.8 Terminal Questions

15.1 Introduction

The social and political order of late medieval China was one of the most stable and most highly organized in the world. Here, a large number of people were bound together over such a wide geographical area by a single political, social and cultural values and traditions, for such a length of time. It had a remarkable capacity to bear the shocks of civil war, natural calamities and foreign invasion, and to accommodate substantial social and economic development and growth of population.

Late medieval China has been characterized in a number of different ways. It has been called as “oriental despotism”, or a “bureaucratic society”. It has also been termed as a “gentry society” or a “Confucian society”. In China the bureaucracy was unique in ancient and medieval period and played an important role in the affairs of the state. It was chiefly an agrarian society which was dominated by the gentry. The basic units of social structure were family and clan. Although Confucianism was not strictly a religion but it influenced the religion and society for remote future.

15.2 Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the key features of the Imperial State of China,
- Explain the characteristics of Chinese society during the late medieval period,
- Explore the role of religion in late medieval China.

15.3 The Chinese State

One of the most remarkable achievements of traditional Chinese civilization was the establishment of the Imperial State. This system, with its deep-rooted traditions, maintained China's unity as a single political entity from ancient times to the modern era. The Emperor, referred to as the “Son of Heaven,” held supreme authority and commanded respect even beyond China’s administrative boundaries.

The most distinctive feature of the Imperial State was its governance through a well-organized bureaucracy. This elite group of officials, known as mandarins, was selected through rigorous examinations based on scholarly merit. The foundation of this state structure was laid in 221 BCE when the ruler of the feudal state of Qin unified China and declared himself the First Emperor. He reorganized the kingdom into standardized administrative units, which were directly governed by imperial officials.

Although the system underwent significant changes under subsequent dynasties and even collapsed following the fall of the Han dynasty around 220 CE, it remained the dominant model for governance throughout late medieval China.



Mandarin

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mandarins_LCCN2011660129.jpg

The Scope of the Chinese Empire

The Chinese Empire faced tensions due to the contradiction between its universal self-image and the actual extent of its administrative control. As the dominant power in East Asia, separated from other civilizations by vast mountains, deserts, and seas, the Chinese naturally viewed their empire as encompassing "all under Heaven" (Tian Xia). The Emperor was not only seen as the ruler of the territories under his direct control but also as a benevolent authority over distant lands. This perception was reinforced by the tribute system, where representatives from non-Chinese states regularly visited the imperial court, presenting gifts symbolizing their respect and submission.

The Emperor governed 18 provinces through a centralized bureaucracy, while border regions retained their autonomy as long as they did not challenge imperial authority. Occasionally, the Chinese Empire extended its political and military control into these frontier areas. Conversely, during periods of internal crisis, external powers

sometimes invaded China. However, even the most successful invasions, such as those by the Mongols and Manchus, did not dismantle the empire but rather led to its continuation under new imperial leadership.

The Emperor

The primary role of the Chinese Emperor was to maintain political, social, and natural order. As the supreme civil and military leader, the Emperor directly appointed officials, who were accountable to him. He personally reviewed government documents and proposals, made decisions, enacted laws, and served as the final authority in legal matters. The Emperor also commanded the armed forces, ensuring military power remained centralized, especially from the 11th century onward, to prevent the rise of regional warlords.

Beyond governance, the Emperor acted as the cultural head, promoting art and learning. This concentration of power led to the perception of China as an autocracy. However, the Emperor's authority was not absolute. He was expected to follow precedents set by previous rulers, particularly those of his own dynasty. Senior officials could criticize the Emperor if he strayed from accepted norms, and a special group known as censors was tasked with holding the Emperor accountable.

The Emperor's role also had a cosmological dimension, as he was viewed as the intermediary between Heaven and Earth. Natural disasters were seen as divine warnings of imperial failure. When such calamities coincided with social unrest, people believed the Emperor had lost the Mandate of Heaven, justifying rebellion. This belief made Emperors and their advisors acutely aware of the impermanence of their rule, often prompting them to adopt reforms or change policies.

The Bureaucracy

Despite frequent wars, internal uprisings, foreign invasions, and dynastic changes, China maintained remarkable political stability due to its well-organized, centrally controlled bureaucracy. This bureaucratic system developed distinct methods

and rules governing recruitment, promotion, transfers, appearance, and conduct. While individual officials could face arbitrary treatment or even execution, the bureaucracy as an institution remained resilient, and no Emperor could effectively govern without it.

Chinese bureaucrats were experts in administration rather than technocrats with specialized knowledge. The civil administration was divided into central and provincial structures. At the central level, the highest-ranking officials served in the Grand Secretariat and later the Grand Council. State affairs were managed by the Six Boards, responsible for civil appointments, revenue, rites, war, punishments, and public works. In the provinces, governors oversaw circuits, prefectures, and districts.

The most distinctive feature of the Chinese bureaucracy was its recruitment system. From the 11th century onward, officials were primarily selected through rigorous examinations based on Confucian scholarship. All males, regardless of background, were eligible to participate, and the candidates' identities were concealed during evaluation to ensure fairness. Success in these exams brought immense social prestige and eligibility for official positions, making examination success the ultimate goal of the educated class. Since only the most talented and competent candidates passed, the system earned the reputation of being a meritocracy. However, the exams tested only literary and Confucian knowledge, not technical expertise.

The relationship between the Emperor and the bureaucracy was symbiotic yet marked by tension. The bureaucracy depended on the Emperor to uphold the examination system that legitimized its authority, while Emperors sought to control bureaucratic power. Officials were prohibited from serving in their home districts and were rotated every three years to prevent local entrenchment. Emperors also employed spies and eunuchs to bypass regular bureaucratic channels.

Despite these tensions, the collaboration between the Emperor and the bureaucracy ensured the enduring stability of the Chinese state. The prestige of the bureaucracy reinforced the preference for civilian over military rule. However, the conservative nature of the bureaucratic system, while ensuring careful administration,

often hindered innovation, making it difficult to adapt to unprecedented crises or challenges.

15.3.1 Society

Agrarian Society

Initially, Chinese society was primarily agrarian, built upon settled agricultural communities in the North China Plain. Most people were peasants, owning small plots of land and paying taxes directly to the state. However, over time, the increasing burden of taxes, exploitation by corrupt officials, and the struggle to survive on limited land forced many peasants to become tenants, paying rent to wealthy landowners. In some areas, rents could consume up to half of the harvest.

The weakening of central authority further worsened their plight, as landlords and local officials exercised unchecked power. The neglect of essential infrastructure, such as dykes, dams, and irrigation systems, led to frequent floods and droughts. These hardships often compelled peasants to abandon their lands, resulting in increased lawlessness and the rise of secret societies. These societies, originally formed as mutual aid groups among displaced villagers, were often driven underground by state suppression. During periods of social unrest, they frequently evolved into powerful rebel movements capable of toppling ruling dynasties.

Between the 11th and 13th centuries CE, China experienced significant economic changes within its agrarian framework. Expanding trade led to greater agricultural specialization, widespread use of paper money, advanced credit systems, and the rise of wealthy merchant families. Despite their prosperity, merchants were socially marginalized. To secure their status, they often invested in land and sought official appointments for themselves or their children. This economic transformation fostered urban growth, increased literacy, and the emergence of a distinct urban culture, setting later imperial Chinese society apart from earlier times.

Gentry-Dominated Society

The 11th century marked a turning point in the composition of China's ruling class. Previously, aristocrats dominated society through noble birth, extensive landholdings, and military power. However, the civil wars following the Tang dynasty's fall in the 10th century dismantled many aristocratic families and fragmented large estates. Subsequent emperors centralized military authority, ensuring that political power could only be attained through imperial service.

Entry into government service required education in Confucian principles, emphasizing loyalty and obedience, followed by success in the imperial examinations. This gave rise to the gentry class, characterized by landownership, education, and government service. Owning land was essential for funding the education of sons, while wealth increasingly stemmed from a combination of land and commerce. Education refined the gentry, distinguishing them socially and culturally from commoners and granting them various privileges.

Within the gentry, an elite subgroup held imperial office. These officials could protect their families from state exploitation and accumulate further wealth. Although social mobility was theoretically possible for any male who passed the exams, it often remained an ideal rather than a reality.

The gentry reinforced imperial power in several ways. Locally, they managed governance and public welfare informally, overseeing projects like dam and road construction, running charitable institutions, resolving disputes, mediating between the populace and district authorities, and organizing militias during unrest. Their deep local knowledge supported district magistrates, who were typically outsiders with short tenures. Since their status depended on regular examinations, the gentry had a vested interest in maintaining imperial governance.

The Ming dynasty's founding emperor famously remarked, "All the most talented men of the empire are in my bag!" while reviewing newly successful examination candidates. This underscored how the gentry's support ensured continuity, even when

dynasties changed, as long as the new rulers upheld the existing administrative and examination systems.

Family and Clan

In Chinese society, the family or household, rather than the individual, was the fundamental social unit, reflected even in tax and government records. Families were patriarchal, with strict hierarchical relationships emphasizing obedience to parents. This structure was reinforced by the practice of ancestor worship, a significant cultural tradition.

While average family sizes were small, particularly among peasants, the ideal of the extended joint family prevailed, especially among the upper classes. This ideal envisioned a patriarch overseeing multiple generations under one roof. Even when families did not live together, kinship ties remained strong, fostering the formation of large clans.

Clans performed vital social functions, including conducting rituals, managing common property like burial plots and ancestral halls, supporting the needy, funding the education of talented young males, resolving internal disputes, maintaining genealogies, and providing moral and ethical guidance. Although clans often included both rich and poor members, they did not erase class divisions.

The imperial state generally endorsed large, cohesive families, viewing them as institutions that instilled obedience, loyalty, and respect for hierarchy. Families also helped maintain social order by curbing deviant behavior. However, the state remained wary of powerful clans potentially challenging its authority and monitored their activities closely.

15.3.2 Religion

Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have long debated the role of religion in late medieval China. While Confucianism was the dominant belief system, it

was largely secular, indifferent to questions about God or the afterlife. China lacked a centralized religious structure or priesthood. Yet, the Chinese exhibited a strong fascination with the supernatural, as evidenced by the widespread veneration of numerous gods, goddesses, and spirits in temples and shrines.

China thus possessed both a deep moral and ethical tradition and a vibrant religious culture. However, the most influential ethical beliefs were rooted not in organized religion but in the "three pillars" of Chinese society: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

Confucianism

Confucianism, an ethical and philosophical system, originated from the teachings of Confucius (551–479 BCE). He lived during a period of social and political turmoil and sought to restore order and moral values. According to Confucius, this could only be achieved if morally upright individuals, or "gentlemen," governed society. Such qualities were not innate but could be cultivated through education, adherence to rituals, and proper relationships.

Confucianism emphasized five key social relationships: parent and child, ruler and subject, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friendships. Central to these relationships were virtues like generosity, filial piety, loyalty, and sincerity. Confucius believed that if virtuous individuals governed, peace and harmony would prevail.

Although Confucius gathered loyal disciples during his lifetime, it was the later adoption of his teachings by the state that elevated Confucianism to a universal philosophy. It shaped Chinese behavior, institutions, and societal norms for centuries, profoundly influencing Chinese civilization.



Confucious

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Confucius,_fresco_from_a_Western_Han_tomb_of_Dongping_County,_Shandong_province,_China.jpg

Confucianism and Its Influence

Confucianism introduced a positive perspective to Chinese thought, emphasizing that the solution to human problems lay not in withdrawing from worldly life or renouncing desires but in developing virtuous qualities and addressing issues within society. It stressed the importance of education, public service, social order, and the fulfillment of one's civic and social responsibilities. This made Confucianism particularly well-suited to reinforcing the authority of the Imperial State. The philosophy endorsed social hierarchy, advocating obedience and submission to authority, likening the bond between ruler and subject to that between parent and child. By promoting governance based on "virtue" or moral authority rather than military might or strict regulations, it softened the harsher aspects of imperial rule and strengthened civilian governance.

Religious Traditions Connected to Confucianism

Confucius himself paid little attention to the concepts of God or an afterlife. However, Confucianism eventually incorporated elements of cosmology and metaphysics, drawing from ancient religious practices and adapting further in response to challenges from Buddhism and Taoism. One significant tradition associated with Confucianism was ancestor worship, practiced widely across China to honor and keep the memory of ancestors alive through various forms of veneration.

Additionally, the ideas of Heaven and Fate became integral. It was believed that Heaven governed all matters, from state affairs to personal lives. Yet, since Heaven, Earth, and Humanity were seen as part of a unified trilogy, human actions were thought capable of influencing divine destiny. Divination practices also formed part of Chinese religious customs. The Confucian belief system embraced the principles of Yin and Yang, representing the unity of opposing forces, such as male and female, light and dark, and youth and age. These opposites were seen as complementary and inseparable.

With the rise of Neo-Confucianism—a revitalized form of Confucianism following its temporary decline due to Buddhism—further metaphysical concepts were integrated into the doctrine. Central to this was the idea that all things originated from a singular source, the Supreme Ultimate (Taiji), composed of li (principle) and qi (matter). From a metaphysical perspective, li represented the underlying order of the universe, while qi referred to the substance through which that order materialized.

Taoism and Buddhism

The diverse pantheon of gods, goddesses, and spirits in Chinese religion stemmed primarily from Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism rather than Confucianism. Taoism emerged around the same time as Confucianism, founded by Lao Zi as a mystical philosophy emphasizing harmony with nature, spontaneity, and a carefree approach to life. Unlike Confucianism, Taoism disregarded societal and state affairs, focusing instead on the natural order. As it evolved, Taoism incorporated various elements, including a pantheon of deities and a priestly order, which facilitated its

spread among the common people, though it never became as organized as Buddhism. It significantly influenced Chinese poetry and painting, infusing them with a lyrical quality and recurring themes of man within nature. Among scholar-officials, Taoism often provided an intellectual refuge from the rigidity and burdens of public and social duties. A common saying reflected this duality: "A scholar-official is Confucian in office and Taoist in retirement."

Buddhism entered China from India during the 1st century CE and flourished between the 5th and 8th centuries CE, enjoying imperial patronage and considerable influence. Both Buddhism and Taoism gained prominence when the imperial system faced crises, and Confucianism—as the ideology of the state—seemed inadequate. Mahayana Buddhism, with its profound philosophy on suffering and its compassionate vision of salvation through self-sacrifice, resonated deeply with the Chinese populace during times of turmoil. Following the fall of the Han dynasty and the resulting political instability and mass displacement, the Buddhist sangha emerged as a crucial institution for social cohesion, extending beyond familial and state boundaries.

Although Buddhism's influence waned with the restoration of the imperial system and the revival of Confucianism after the 10th century, it never entirely disappeared. Instead, it continued to shape popular religious practices and, alongside Taoism, served as the ideological foundation for several significant rebel movements.

General Characteristics of Religion in China

Religion in China was highly diverse, with different traditions coexisting rather than being viewed as mutually exclusive. Individuals often practiced Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism simultaneously without exclusive allegiance to any single tradition. This flexibility allowed various traditions to persist even when one dominated. Religious conflicts based solely on doctrinal differences were rare. The state generally tolerated different faiths, intervening only when a religious movement was perceived as a threat to social order or state authority. Persecution typically resulted in the closure of

monasteries and the return of monks and nuns to secular life, rather than widespread violence or forced conversion.

Moreover, the moral dimension of Chinese deities was relatively weak. People worshipped gods and goddesses primarily for their perceived ability to provide protection or cause harm, rather than for any intrinsic moral righteousness.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 Who were mandarins?
- Q.2 What do you understand by Mandate of Heaven?
- Q.3 What was the method of recruitment of Chinese bureaucracy?
- Q.4 Who were gentry in China?
- Q.5 What was the fundamental unit of Chinese society?
- Q.6 Name the three pillars of Chinese society.
- Q.7 What is Confucianism?
- Q.8 What do you understand by Taoism?
- Q.9 Explain the principle of Yin and Yang.
- Q.10 Which sect of Buddhism gained popularity in late medieval China?

15.4 Summary

- China, being a vast and diverse country, resists simple generalizations about its traditions and institutions.
- These traditions were dynamic, evolving significantly throughout China's long history.
- The social and political structure of late medieval China was among the most stable and organized in the world.
- Scholars have described late medieval China in various ways, including as an “oriental despotism,” a “bureaucratic society,” a “gentry society,” and a “Confucian society.”
- One of the most remarkable features of traditional Chinese civilization was the Imperial State, governed by the Emperor and administered by a structured bureaucracy known as mandarins.

- A key source of tension within the Chinese Empire was the contrast between its self-perception as a universal power and the actual territorial limits of its administrative control.
- The Emperor's primary duty was to uphold political, social, and natural order.
- While China's political system is often described as despotic or autocratic, the Emperor's power was not entirely unchecked.
- The stability of China's unified imperial state and institutions largely stemmed from its tradition of rule by a centralized bureaucracy, which persisted even during major uprisings.
- The most distinctive aspect of the Chinese bureaucracy was its recruitment process, based on rigorous examinations.
- Originally, Chinese society was primarily agrarian. However, between the 11th and 13th centuries CE, the economy underwent significant transformation while retaining its agrarian foundation.
- Over time, a ruling elite known as the gentry emerged, distinguished by landownership, education, and involvement in government service.
- In Chinese society, the family or household, rather than the individual, was considered the fundamental social unit.
- The three major philosophical and religious pillars of Chinese society were Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.
- Confucianism, based on the teachings of Confucius (551–479 BCE), emphasized ethical conduct and social harmony.
- Taoism, founded by Lao Zi around the same period as Confucius, promoted a mystical philosophy focused on nature, spontaneity, and a carefree approach to life.
- Buddhism reached China in the 1st century CE and flourished between the 5th and 8th centuries CE, gaining imperial patronage and empowering the Buddhist sangha.

15.5 Glossary

Dyke: A long thick wall constructed to prevent the sea or a river from flooding low land.

Filial: Related with the relationship between children and their parents

Formidable: Causing fear, apprehension, or dread.

Sangha: The Buddhist monastic order, including monks, nuns, and novices.

Turbulence: The quality or state of being turbulent; violent disorder or commotion.

15.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Mandarins were important public officials & bureaucrats, playing a vital role in the country's imperial history.

Ans.2 The Mandate of Heaven is a Chinese political philosophy that was used in ancient and imperial China to justify the rule of the King or Emperor of China.

Ans.3 By means of a series of tough examinations that tested the mastery of Confucian scholarship of the candidates.

Ans.4 The "gentry", or "landed gentry" in China was the elite who held privileged status through passing the Imperial exams, which made them eligible to hold office.

Ans.5 Family

Ans.6 Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism

Ans.7 The term Confucianism refers to the Chinese ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 BCE).

Ans.8 Taoism is a Chinese religious philosophy which believes that people should lead a simple honest life and not interfere with the course of natural events.

Ans.9 This principle states that all things exist as inseparable and contradictory opposites. For example, male-female, light-dark and young-old. The pairs of equal and opposites attract and complement each other.

Ans.10 Mahayana sect.

15.7 Suggested Readings

1. Bary, W.T. de. Sources of Chinese Tradition, Vol. 1. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.

2. Bishop, John L. *Studies of Governmental Institutions in Chinese History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968.
3. Fairbank, John K., ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968.
4. Mote, Frederick. *Imperial China: 900-1800*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.
5. Ping-ti Ho. *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962.
6. Wright, A.F. *Buddhism in Chinese History*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1959.
7. Yang, C.K. *Religion in Chinese Society*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970.

15.8 Terminal Questions

1. Can the Emperor be regarded as an autocratic ruler of the Chinese state?
2. What made the Chinese bureaucracy distinctive, and how did it contribute to state governance?
3. Provide a detailed account of Chinese society during the late medieval period.
4. Describe the religious landscape of China in the late medieval era.
5. Should Confucianism be classified as a religion?
6. Write brief notes on:
 - (i) Family and Clan in China
 - (ii) Spread of Buddhism in China
 - (iii) Taoism

UNIT-16

POPULATION AND AGRICULTURE IN MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Structure

16.1 Introduction

16.2 Objectives

16.3 Population and Agriculture in Medieval Period

16.3.1 Population in Europe

16.3.2 Volume and Nature of Agricultural Production

16.3.3 Towns and the Urbanization of Medieval Society

Self-Check Exercise-1

16.4 Summary

16.5 Glossary

16.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

16.7 Suggested Readings

16.8 Terminal Questions

16.1 Introduction

Changes in population dynamics have significantly influenced various aspects of human life, shaping social structures and economic systems. Populations are not just passive statistics; their variations drive transformations in family structures, marriage practices, and social interactions. On a larger scale, demographic shifts have triggered substantial changes, such as the transition from medieval to modern society, as seen in Europe.

Agriculture played a central role in medieval European life, with the majority of the population relying on the land for sustenance. The demographic expansion during the 11th century and the rise of urban centers were closely tied to increased agricultural productivity. The Middle Ages marked a crucial phase of urbanization, particularly between 1000 and 1300 CE, as growing populations and expanding commerce reshaped the European landscape. New towns emerged alongside the growth of

established urban centers, while some towns prospered, others declined, and some disappeared or reverted to villages.

16.2 Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand population trends in medieval Europe.
- Explore the volume and nature of agricultural production during this period.
- Examine the emergence of towns and urbanization in medieval European society.

16.3 Population and Agriculture in the Medieval Period

16.3.1 Population in Europe

During the Early Middle Ages, Europe's population growth was limited, and urbanization remained well below Roman levels. This stagnation resulted from low technological advancement, restricted trade, and socio-political instability caused by Viking invasions from the north, Arab expansion from the south, and the movement of Slavs, Bulgarians, and later the Magyars from the east. Such uncertainties fostered the development of feudalism and the spread of Christianity.

During Charlemagne's reign, Europe's population was estimated between 25 and 30 million, with nearly half residing in the Carolingian Empire, encompassing modern France, the Low Countries, western Germany, Austria, Slovenia, northern Italy, and parts of northern Spain. Most medieval settlements were small, surrounded by agricultural land and vast, sparsely populated wilderness.

Between the 10th and 13th centuries, agricultural expansion, known as the "great clearances," saw forests and marshes cleared for cultivation. The Ostsiedlung witnessed German resettlement in sparsely populated regions previously inhabited by Polabian Slavs. Crusaders established states in the Levant, portions of the Iberian Peninsula were reclaimed from the Moors, and Normans colonized England and

southern Italy. These movements formed part of a broader pattern of population growth and resettlement across Europe.

Several factors fueled this expansion:

- The Medieval Warm Period extended growing seasons, enhancing agricultural productivity.
- Cessation of Viking, Arab, and Magyar raids led to increased political stability.
- Technological advancements allowed more land to be cultivated.
- Church reforms in the 11th century promoted social stability.
- The rise of feudalism further strengthened societal order.

Urban centers revived alongside trade growth and the rise of a money economy, which weakened serfdom. Initially, abundant land and scarce labor prompted feudal lords to adopt strategies to attract and retain workers. Urban centers offered serfs freedom, encouraging migration. As new regions were settled internally and externally, Europe's population reached approximately 75 million.

Population estimates for key regions include:

- **England:** Around 1.5 million in 1086 CE, rising to 3.7–7 million by the 14th century, though post-plague estimates vary based on assumed mortality rates and taxable population records.
- **Italy:** Between 10 and 13 million around 1300 CE.
- **France:** In 1328 CE, between 13.4 million and 18–20 million, a figure not surpassed until the early modern period.
- **Kievan Rus:** Estimated between 4.5 and 8 million.

By the 14th century, frontier expansion had ceased, yet population levels remained high. However, the Crisis of the Late Middle Ages, marked by the Great Famine (1315 CE) and the Black Death (1348 CE), led to a dramatic population decline. Europe faced its greatest losses between 1348 and 1420 CE—Germany lost 40% of its named inhabitants, Provence's population was halved, and Tuscany saw a 70% decline.

Historians continue to debate the causes of this dramatic decline. While infectious disease remains the primary explanation, some scholars emphasize socioeconomic factors. Malthusian theory suggests Europe was overpopulated, struggling to sustain its population even in favorable conditions. In the 14th century, grain yields ranged from 2:1 to 7:1, meaning two to seven seeds were harvested per seed planted. Malnutrition gradually weakened immunity, while competition for resources led to conflicts. Crop yields further declined due to the Little Ice Age.

Another theory attributes the crisis to economic imbalance. As competition for resources intensified, the gap between property owners and workers widened. The money supply failed to keep pace with economic activity, causing wages to fall while rents rose. Poor living conditions heightened vulnerability to plague outbreaks. Wealthy individuals could flee to rural estates, while the poor, crowded into urban areas, faced greater exposure. Malnourished, poor sanitation, and harsh working conditions further weakened immunity.

Following the population decline, reduced labor supply increased wages and boosted labor mobility. This redistribution of wealth met resistance from property owners, who sought to impose wage freezes and price controls, sparking uprisings such as the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 CE. By 1450 CE, Europe's population was significantly lower than 150 years earlier, yet living standards had generally improved across all classes.

Key population trends during the Middle Ages can be summarized as follows:

- **400–600 CE (Late Antiquity):** Population decline.
- **600–1000 CE (Early Middle Ages):** Stable at a low level, with erratic growth.
- **1000–1250 CE (High Middle Ages):** Population boom and territorial expansion.
- **1250–1348 CE (Late Middle Ages):** Stable or intermittently rising, with decline during the 1315–17 CE famine.
- **1348–1420 CE (Late Middle Ages):** Sharp decline in Western Europe, growth in East Central Europe.

- **1420–1470 CE (Late Middle Ages):** Stability or further decline in Western Europe, continued growth in the east.
- **After 1470 CE:** Gradual population recovery, gaining momentum by the early 16th century.

The Brenner Debate

In 1976, historian Robert Brenner proposed another explanation for limited population growth during the High Middle Ages. According to Brenner, feudal lords controlled most of Europe's land and extracted high rents or a significant share of peasants' profits. This economic pressure forced peasants to subsist at minimal levels, leaving them with insufficient capital for agricultural investment.

Additionally, the small size of peasant farms hindered efficient, centralized cultivation. In regions with less widespread primogeniture, peasant lands were continually subdivided with each generation, further reducing individual incomes. As a result, peasants lacked the surplus needed for agricultural innovation.

Thus, Europe's population remained constrained by the prevailing social and economic structures. When population levels exceeded the economic system's capacity, instability, famine, and population decline ensued. Brenner argued that only by transforming land ownership and distribution patterns could Europe surpass the population levels of the early 14th century.

16.3.2 Volume and Nature of Agricultural Production

Medieval European agriculture encompassed farming practices, crops, technology, and the agricultural economy from the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE to 1500 CE.

Three major events shaped medieval agriculture:

1. **Fall of the Western Roman Empire:** Beginning around 400 CE, the empire lost territory to barbarian invaders.

2. **Global Cooling:** Volcanic eruptions triggered a cooling period from 536 to 660 CE.
3. **Justinian Plague:** Starting in 541 CE and recurring until 750 CE, this plague claimed up to one-quarter of Europe's population.

The combined impact of climatic cooling and recurrent plagues severely reduced agricultural productivity during this period.



Agriculture in middle Ages

Source:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture_in_the_Middle_Ages

Agricultural Developments and Urbanization in Medieval Europe

By 600 CE, Europe's population had significantly declined compared to 500 CE. This reduction is often attributed to the fall of the Western Roman Empire, commonly viewed as the beginning of a "dark age" in Western Europe. However, the collapse of imperial authority led to certain benefits for farmers, who comprised over 80% of the population. With the decline of tax obligations and the weakening of the aristocracy, many peasants enjoyed increased freedom.

In contrast, the agricultural landscape of the Eastern Roman Empire took a different trajectory during the early Middle Ages. The 5th and 6th centuries witnessed the growth of market-oriented and industrial farming. Meanwhile, the Iberian Peninsula experienced both farmland abandonment and reforestation due to population decline, alongside expanded grazing and market-driven livestock farming, including horses, mules, and donkeys.

Arab Muslim rulers introduced several new crops to the Iberian Peninsula, such as sugarcane, rice, durum wheat, citrus fruits, cotton, and figs. These crops required advanced irrigation techniques and water management systems, revolutionizing agricultural practices in the region.

Crop yields in medieval Europe were relatively low but comparable to those of the Roman Empire. Yields were typically measured by the ratio of harvested seeds to those sown. For instance, records from Sussex, England, between 1350 and 1399 CE show an average yield of 4.34 seeds per seed sown for wheat, 4.01 for barley, and 2.87 for oats. From 1250 to 1450 CE, average grain yields in England ranged from 7 to 15 bushels per acre, though poor harvests could drop below 4 bushels per acre. These figures were representative of much of medieval Europe.

Medieval agriculture often faced criticism for its inefficiency and low productivity. Scholars attributed this stagnation to the established open-field system, characterized by communal land management and fragmented landholdings. The "Postan Thesis" further blamed low productivity on inadequate pastureland for farm animals, resulting in insufficient nitrogen-rich manure to maintain soil fertility. Additionally, population growth after 1000 CE led to the conversion of marginal lands, pastures, and woodlands into arable fields, further reducing the availability of manure.

The first signs of agricultural advancement emerged in the 14th and 15th centuries, particularly in the Low Countries of the Netherlands, Belgium, and northern France (Flanders). Here, fallow land was minimized by planting cover crops like vetch,

beans, turnips, and broom, along with high-value crops such as rapeseed, madder, and hops. This marked a shift from extensive to intensive cultivation on smaller plots.

Agricultural underproduction persisted in regions like Russia until the 19th century. In 1850 CE, Russia's average grain yield was only 600 kilograms per hectare—less than half the yield in England and the Low Countries during the same period.

Crop failures and poor harvests frequently led to famine in medieval Europe. Importing grain from other regions was challenging due to high transportation costs, with prices doubling every 50 miles. A study found that famines occurred approximately every 20 years between 750 and 950 CE, primarily due to extreme weather rather than warfare. Research on crop failures in Winchester, England, from 1232 to 1349 CE revealed harvest failures every 12 years for wheat and every 8 years for oats and barley.

However, warfare occasionally triggered famines, such as in Hungary from 1243 to 1245 CE, following the Mongol invasion. This conflict led to the deaths of 20% to 25% of Hungary's population due to war and hunger. The Great Famine of 1315–1317 CE was the most severe famine of the Middle Ages, affecting 30 million people in northern Europe, with a mortality rate of 5% to 10%. Crop yields dropped by one-third to one-fourth, and numerous draft animals perished.

One of the most significant agricultural advancements in medieval Europe was the widespread adoption of the mouldboard and heavy plough around 1000 CE. These ploughs enabled farmers to cultivate the fertile but dense clay soils of northern Europe. By turning the soil, they improved weed control and soil fertility, creating the distinctive ridge-and-furrow field pattern that also facilitated drainage.

These innovations fueled significant population growth in Europe between 1000 and 1300 CE—a trend halted by the Great Famine and the Black Death of the 14th century.

16.3.3 Urbanization and the Rise of Towns in Medieval Society

Urbanization has long been associated with the advancement of civilization, with towns serving as cultural hubs. Throughout history, societies have celebrated their towns for their grandeur, wealth, aristocratic lifestyles, intellectual vibrancy, and diverse populations. During the medieval period, towns emerged worldwide as dynamic centers of development and opportunity, particularly for skilled and talented individuals. For peasants and serfs burdened by feudal oppression, towns offered a path to social and economic advancement.

Pre-industrial towns differed significantly from rural areas, presenting distinct economic, political, social, and cultural environments. Western European towns were closely tied to capitalism, often undermining feudal structures. Henri Pirenne's research highlights how the closure of Mediterranean trade routes in the 7th to 9th centuries led to the dominance of an agrarian economy, with each demesne functioning as a self-sufficient domestic unit. However, the revival of long-distance trade in the 11th century—aided by Christianity's push against Islam—revitalized towns, markets, and commerce, breaking down the demesne system.

Towns enjoyed varying degrees of economic and political autonomy. As business hubs, they significantly impacted small estates owned by knights and facilitated the growth of a money economy. The exploitative demands of rural lords often drove the rural population to migrate to towns. Despite this urbanization, most medieval towns were relatively small. Few had populations exceeding 20,000 inhabitants, and by the 14th century, only Italian and Flemish cities had populations of 40,000 to 50,000. New York had merely 11,000 residents, while Bristol had 9,500. Even in the 15th century, Hamburg had 22,000 inhabitants, Nuremberg 20,000 to 25,000, Ulm 20,000, and Augsburg 18,000.

Initially, urban craftsmen, merchants, and small traders depended on the feudal economy. European medieval towns were often enclosed by walls with ramparts, marking their boundaries and providing protection. Access to these towns was regulated through guarded gates.

Fernand Braudel categorized Western towns into three types: open towns, which blended with the surrounding countryside; closed towns, which maintained distinct boundaries; and subjugated towns, controlled by external powers. These urban centers were not only economic hubs but also instrumental in transitioning society from the medieval period to the modern era.



Town in Medieval Europe

Source: <https://home.uchicago.edu/~rfulton/towns.htm>

In many instances, towns were divided into distinct zones designated for residential purposes, markets, government offices, and judicial establishments. The layout of these towns was not systematically planned, and their growth was largely unorganized, especially in early European cities. Overcrowding in large towns led to narrow streets, compact dwellings, and continuous expansion of urban boundaries. The city center served as the focal point for business and administrative activities, while producers and craftsmen typically lived on the town's outskirts.

There was a reciprocal relationship between towns and the countryside. Towns relied on rural areas for food supplies and engaged in long-distance trade only under special circumstances, usually if they held privileged status like Florence, Venice,

Naples, or Rome. Up until the 18th century, several large towns retained rural characteristics, with agricultural workers, shepherds, and vine-growers even residing within cities like Paris. Many small European towns resembled large villages, earning them the label "rural towns." During harvest seasons, numerous town inhabitants would temporarily relocate to rural areas for agricultural work.

Beginnings of Urban Society and Economy

The medieval period saw a revival of urbanism across Europe, with a notable proliferation of urban centers in both Europe and Asia. The defining characteristic of medieval towns was the continuity of settlements at specific sites, accompanied by gradual increases in population, territorial expansion, craft production, and commercial activities. These towns played a crucial role in transitioning medieval societies toward the modern era. In Europe, they became hubs for communication networks and heralded the Industrial Revolution.

The origins of medieval towns in later medieval Europe remain a subject of historical debate. Some historians argue that these towns evolved from ancient Roman cities, as certain larger towns retained institutional continuity despite periods of nomadic invasions. However, this theory is challenged by the fact that many Roman towns vanished during the Dark Ages, and their institutions and architectural styles became obsolete in the early medieval period.

The growth of trade and markets in Western Europe is commonly viewed as a catalyst for the decline of feudalism and the rise of urban centers between the 11th and 14th centuries. Some scholars suggest that these towns had purely rural origins, emerging within the feudal structure, with inhabitants initially maintaining dependent relationships with overlords and agriculture remaining a primary qualification for citizenship. Only later did trade become the primary occupation, and fortifying settlements with walls marked the transition from villages to towns.

Henri Pirenne proposed an alternative theory, asserting that medieval towns originated from merchant caravan settlements. Initially, traders traveled between fairs or

feudal households, often forming caravans for mutual protection. They established settlements near old Roman towns, benefiting from favorable locations at road junctions or the protective walls of feudal castles. These settlements were further safeguarded by kings and knights in exchange for payments.

Some English towns emerged along trade routes or river estuaries. For instance, Manchester transitioned from an agricultural village to a borough, while Cambridge developed from clustered villages near an old castle and camp, with its location near a ford driving its growth. Oxford followed a similar trajectory.

Pirenne also attributed the survival of towns after their decline between the 8th and 10th centuries to the revival of Mediterranean maritime commerce. This resurgence stimulated transcontinental trade caravans and local trader settlements. Earlier Islamic invasions had disrupted maritime trade, but the 11th century saw the reopening of eastern trade routes. The Crusades of the 11th and 12th centuries further facilitated Mediterranean trade and commerce.

Determining the extent of urbanization or the proportion of urban inhabitants in the medieval period is challenging. There is no consensus regarding the minimum population required to classify a settlement as a town or city. Population estimates for European towns varied widely, ranging from a few hundred to several hundred thousand inhabitants. In France, a population of at least 2,000 qualified a place as a town, while in England, the threshold was 5,000. According to Braudel, around 13% of England's population lived in towns with at least 5,000 inhabitants in 1700 CE, increasing to 16% in 1750 CE and 25% in 1801 CE.

The growth of European towns was significant. By the 16th and 17th centuries, more than fifty towns had populations exceeding 40,000, with twelve towns surpassing 100,000 and three exceeding 400,000 inhabitants. London's population, for example, rose from under 60,000 in the early 16th century to around 200,000 in the early 17th century and over 400,000 by century's end.

The rapid urbanization of the medieval period profoundly influenced administration, economy, and society, contributing to the transition toward the modern world. In medieval European towns, only the wealthy enjoyed full citizenship rights. In Venice, there were two categories of citizens—full and ordinary—requiring 15 and 25 years of residence, respectively. Ordinary townsfolk often viewed newcomers with hostility, reflecting the limited concept of citizenship prevalent across medieval Europe.

Economic privileges, including control over industry and crafts, were concentrated within towns. Merchant guilds held significant power, often excluding rural populations from engaging in urban trades such as spinning, weaving, and dyeing. By the 13th and 14th centuries, prolonged struggles between town communities and feudal lords in Western Europe resulted in towns attaining varying degrees of autonomy. The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 in England saw active support from urban elements, further empowering towns to achieve partial or complete independence from feudal dominance.

While merchant communities dominated large medieval cities, older aristocratic families also retained significant landholdings in and around urban centers, reflecting the persistence of feudal elements within the emerging urban society. In England, social inequalities were relatively mild before the 14th century, as traders, merchants, craftsmen, and retail traders all belonged to the Merchant Guild. Economic and social distinctions between master craftsmen and journeymen were minimal. However, as towns expanded, original landowners profited from land sales and high rental rates.

Two significant changes characterized the 13th and 14th centuries regarding craft production and trade. First, a distinct trading class, particularly in England, separated itself from production and established exclusive organizations monopolizing specific wholesale trades. Second, these trading organizations gained political control over town governments, subjugating craftsmen.

Rising agricultural productivity enabled rural populations to engage in urban craft production, fueling commercial growth. Towns thus evolved from mere centers of exchange into hubs of production. Guilds further strengthened urban economies and

governance, marking the dominance of big merchants who would later drive the Industrial Revolution. Expanding urban populations necessitated large-scale construction, shaping the architectural character of towns across Europe.

The development of towns was a result of economic, social, and cultural synthesis. While towns retained some features of their settlers' original cultures, they also attracted people from diverse regions and nationalities. Immigrants brought their traditions, folklore, and festivals, forming distinct communities. However, the social structure shifted from clan-based ties to family-oriented households, fostering new social bonds.

During this period, towns also became centers of knowledge, replacing monasteries as hubs of learning. Schools and universities proliferated, and by 1338 CE, Florence alone had thousands of students studying literacy and commercial practices. The 15th-century advent of printing technology democratized access to books, creating an intellectual elite ready to challenge the aristocracy. This educated class, combined with advancements in science, arts, and literature, thrived within the opportunities provided by urban centers.

By the end of the medieval period, towns dominated social, cultural, economic, and political life. The urban middle class's social and political success, along with its values, had far-reaching consequences. The emergence of medieval towns and the rise of the urban bourgeoisie transformed every aspect of socioeconomic life, laying the groundwork for the Industrial Revolution.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 What do understand by the term “great clearances” in Europe?
- Q.2 Explain medieval warm period.
- Q.3 What do you mean by Crisis of the Late Middle Ages?
- Q.4 What do you know about Brenner’s debate?
- Q.5 What was Post-on Thesis?
- Q.6 In the 14th and 15th centuries, where do we find the earliest evidence of

progress in increasing productivity?

Q.7 Which is the best known and most extensive famine of the Middle Ages?

Q.8 Define rural towns.

Q.9 What was Henri Pirenne argument for the origin of medieval towns?

Q.10 Name any popular town of England that developed from a village.

16.4 Summary

- During the Early Middle Ages in Europe, population growth was slow, and urbanization remained well below the levels seen during the Roman period, reflecting limited technological advancement.
- Trade was restricted, and political, social, and economic instability further hindered development.
- Between the 10th and 13th centuries, agricultural expansion took place as forests and marshes were cleared, leading to population growth and the resettlement of lands.
- By the 14th century, the expansion of cultivated land had ceased, and internal colonization reached its peak, although population levels remained high.
- The Crisis of the Late Middle Ages followed, marked by a series of catastrophic events that caused widespread mortality.
- Historians have struggled to identify definitive causes for this population decline, with some challenging the traditional view that infectious diseases were solely responsible, suggesting social factors also played a role.
- Crop yields during medieval times were relatively low, though likely comparable to those of the Roman Empire and the early modern period.
- Scholars have often criticized medieval agriculture for its inefficiency and low productivity.
- The "Postan Thesis" attributes this low productivity to inadequate pastures for livestock, resulting in a shortage of nitrogen-rich manure needed for soil fertility.
- The first signs of agricultural progress appeared in the 14th and 15th centuries in the Low Countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium, and the Flanders region of northern France.

- In some regions, such as Russia, low agricultural productivity persisted until the 19th century.
- Famines due to crop failures were a recurring threat in medieval Europe, with studies indicating that they occurred approximately every 20 years between 750 and 950 CE.
- A major agricultural advancement during the Middle Ages was the widespread adoption of the moldboard and heavy plough around 1000 CE, significantly boosting agricultural output.
- Urbanization played a crucial role not only in Europe but across the medieval world, with the rise of towns being a significant historical development.
- However, medieval urbanization differed from earlier phases, marking a transition toward the modern world and giving rise to important administrative, social, and economic institutions.
- The number of urban centers increased during the medieval period, with notable growth in size and population, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries.
- Towns were often enclosed by walls and gates, a characteristic common to both European and Asian settlements.
- Culturally, urban centers stood apart from the surrounding countryside, with European towns enjoying greater autonomy compared to their Asian counterparts.
- Despite their physical separation, towns maintained strong economic and social ties with rural areas.
- Town-based economies and societies dominated the regions they were situated in, particularly in Europe, where towns emerged as key drivers of the transition to the modern world.

16.5 Glossary

Decameron: A collection of tales by Giovanni Boccaccio, probably composed between 1349 and 1353 CE.

Demesne: A piece of land attached to a manor and retained by the owner for their own use.

The Little Ice Age: It was a period of regional cooling, particularly pronounced in the North Atlantic region which occurred after the Medieval Warm Period.

Open-field System: The traditional medieval system of farming in England, in which land was divided into strips and managed by an individual only in the growing season.

Ostsiedlung: It is the term for the High Medieval migration period of ethnic Germans into and beyond the territories at the eastern periphery of the Holy Roman Empire and the consequences for settlement development and social structures in the immigration areas.

16.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 There was expansion of agriculture in Europe from the 10th to 13th centuries, into the wilderness, in what has been termed the "great clearances". Many forests and marshes were cleared and cultivated during the High Middle Ages.

Ans.2 The Medieval Warm Period was the period of warm climate in the North Atlantic region that lasted from 950 to 1250 CE.

Ans.3 The Crisis of the Late Middle Ages was a sequence of events in the 14th and 15th centuries that brought to an end centuries of European stability. Demographic collapse, political instabilities and religious upheavals were the three major crises that led to radical changes in society.

Ans.4 According to Robert Brenner the feudal lords and landlords controlled most of Europe's land; they could charge high enough rents or demand a hefty percentage of peasants' profit due to which peasants on these lands were forced to survive at subsistence levels and they did not possess adequate capital to invest in their farms.

Ans.5 It states that medieval agriculture had low productivity because there were inadequate pasture for farm animals and thus, shortage of nitrogen-rich manure to keep the arable land fertile.

Ans.6 Low Countries of the Netherlands and Belgium, and Flanders in northern France.

Ans.7 The Great Famine of 1315–1317 CE.

Ans.8 Many small towns of Europe were the same as the big villages. They had

some features of the countryside. Therefore, they were known as rural towns.

Ans.9 Henri Pirenne asserted that towns originated in settlements of merchants' caravans. Initially, the traders were wandering peddlers and they selected the site of an old Roman town for settlement, due to its favourable location.

Ans.10 Manchester

16.7 Suggested Readings

1. Biller, Peter, *The Measure of Multitude: Population in Medieval Thought*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
2. Buko, A. & McCarthy, M., *Making a Medieval Town: Patterns of Early Medieval Urbanization*, Archeobooks, 2010.
3. Clark, Gregory, *The Economics of Exhaustion, the Postan Thesis, and the Agricultural Revolution*, *The Journal of Economic History*, 1992.
4. Heather, Peter, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
5. Hollingsworth, Thomas, *Historical Demography*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969.
6. Machacek, Jiri & Barton, Milos, *The Rise of Medieval Towns and States in East Central Europe: Early Medieval Centres as Social and Economic Systems (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, Vol. 10)*, Brill Academic Publishing, 2010.
7. Pounds, N. J. G., *An Historical Geography of Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
8. Russell, Josiah, *Medieval Demography: Essays*, AMS Studies in the Middle Ages, New York: AMS Press, 1987.

16.8 Terminal Questions

1. Summarize the population trends in medieval Europe.
2. Describe the scale and characteristics of agricultural production during the medieval period.
3. Provide a brief account of urbanization in medieval Europe.

4. Write a short note on the expansion of towns in medieval Europe.
5. What can you tell about the origins of urban society and the economy in medieval Europe?

UNIT- 17

MEDIEVAL TRADE AND COMMERCE- I

Structure

17.1 Introduction

17.2 Objectives

17.3 Oceanic Trade

17.3.1 India's Maritime Trade

17.3.2 Europeans in the Indian Ocean

17.3.3 Items Exported from India

17.3.4 Imports into India

Self-Check Exercise -1

17.4 Summary

17.5 Glossary

17.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

17.7 Suggested Readings

17.8 Terminal Questions

17.1 Introduction

The rise of Islam influenced not only the Indian Ocean but also the Mediterranean. Muslims dominated oceanic trade for over three centuries. The arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean did not significantly alter the trade structure, direction, or organization. However, the entry of European trading companies, particularly the English and Dutch, marked an important development. Indian commodities like textiles, raw silk, and saltpeter were highly sought after in Europe. Since the trade balance favored India, Europeans had to pay in bullion and cash for their imports.

17.2 Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand medieval oceanic trade.
- Analyze the features of medieval India's maritime trade.
- Describe European trade practices in the Indian Ocean.

17.3 Oceanic Trade

In the medieval period, the rise of Islam had a profound impact on oceanic trade. Arab and Muslim merchants played a crucial role in developing an extensive commercial network. The Indian Ocean's coastal regions, stretching from East Africa to the China Sea, became hubs of commercial activity primarily controlled by Muslim traders. From the 7th to the 15th centuries, the trade structure and routes remained consistent, with a major transcontinental route running from southern China to the eastern Mediterranean. Alongside, shorter trade routes facilitated regional exchanges.

By the 10th century, Arab ships regularly stopped at intermediate ports en route to China. Historical records confirm that by the early 8th century, Muslim traders had established commercial connections across the Indian Ocean, linking South Asia and China. This trade unified the long-distance trade arteries between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, which were historically connected through the Red Sea and the combined sea, river, and overland routes of the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and the Syrian Desert. These regions initially fell under the political control of the Umayyads and later the Abbasids. Despite religious divisions between the Christian North and Muslim South, the Mediterranean regained much of its economic unity through the activities of merchants and traders.

Trade in medieval Asia centered around four major products—silk, porcelain, sandalwood, and black pepper—which were exchanged for incense, horses, ivory, cotton textiles, and metal goods. By the late 7th and early 8th centuries, ships from the Persian Gulf were already sailing to Canton to purchase Chinese silk and other goods. China viewed the Arab world as the largest storehouse of precious goods, while Java and Sumatra served as key trade crossroads. For over a millennium, southern Arabia,

the Persian Gulf, and Southeast Asia remained sources of luxury goods such as gems, pearls, incense, perfume, sandalwood, and spices.

Following the Mongol conquest of China in 1280 CE, maritime connections strengthened. The ports of Hangchow and Zaiton flourished, as noted by travelers like Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta. When Ibn Battuta visited Zaiton in 1343-44 CE, he described it as the world's greatest port, surpassing Alexandria, Quilon, and Calicut in commercial activity.

Significant changes in Indian Ocean trade occurred between the late 10th and mid-15th centuries. The fall of the Abbasid Caliphate and the rise of the Fatimids in Egypt redirected long-distance trade from Baghdad and Damascus to Aden and Fustat. In India, the Delhi Sultanate's conquest of Gujarat in 1303-04 CE extended Islamic socio-political influence to its maritime cities. Around the same period, the coastal states and trading ports of the Indonesian archipelago began converting to Islam, a process that continued for the next 300 years.

These transformations paralleled changes in the Christian Mediterranean. The expulsion of the Moors from Spain and the commercial rise of Venice and Genoa marked a realignment of the global economy. Alexandria's importance as a transcontinental trade hub increased after the Fatimids moved their capital to Old Cairo. During the Ayyubid (1170-1260 CE) and Mamluk (1260-1517 CE) periods, Cairo maintained its economic strength by developing Red Sea ports.

In China, the Ming dynasty's (1368-1644 CE) economic policies had mixed effects on maritime trade. Emperor Yongle (1402-1424 CE) initiated ambitious maritime expeditions between 1404 and 1433 CE to expand China's trade relations. However, these expeditions were later abandoned, and future Ming rulers closed China's seashores to foreign traders. Though foreign trade was officially banned, smuggling continued to destinations like the Philippines, Tongking, and Malacca.

17.3.1 India's Maritime Trade

Medieval India's maritime trade reflected both continuity and change. Historically, India exported drugs, spices, Malabar teak, precious stones, and luxury items to the West, while importing war animals, spices, medicament s, rare goods, toys, and exotic textiles. Expanding maritime activity in the eastern Indian Ocean and China Sea reshaped trade patterns during the early medieval period.

Indian merchants expanded their textile trade to Southeast Asia, where strong Indian and Buddhist influences had already fostered thriving markets. Indonesian spices and raw materials became integral to Indian Ocean trade. Muslim merchants from Gujarat dominated trade in the Indonesian and Malay Peninsula markets, while Bengal exported significant quantities of cloth. Trade links with Africa and the Arabian Peninsula were also prominent. Indian exports reached distant markets, including Cairo, Hormuz, Iran, the West, Russia, and Central Asia.

According to historians Genevieve Bouchon and Denys Lombard, the 15th century saw extraordinary commercial activity in the Indian Ocean, marked by the "last flowering" of Chinese presence. Though the Chinese withdrew from western routes in the 1430s, Malacca remained a key meeting point for Chinese, Indian, and Malay traders. While the Arabs faced challenges in the western Indian Ocean, the withdrawal of the Chinese created a trade vacuum, which was filled by Gujarati merchants. Gujarati overseas trade expanded significantly during the 15th century.

Ashin Das Gupta argued that the major shift in the Indian Ocean trade occurred not due to Portuguese arrival but because of the rise of the Mughals, Safavids, and Ottomans. After initial conflicts, the Portuguese integrated into the existing trade structure rather than transforming it. Gujarati Muslims dominated Indian shipping, controlling sea routes between Cambay and Malacca. Indian ships regularly traded with Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports, while Arab ship owners dominated the Arabian Sea. Chinese vessels controlled waters between southern China and Malaya, while Malay and Javanese ships dominated Indonesian waters. This loosely organized structure persisted for the next three centuries.

The primary trade route ran from Aden to Malacca via Gujarat or Malabar. Goods moving through the Red Sea included cotton, indigo, spices, and drugs, while imports comprised European wool, silk, and bullion. Gujarat supplied most of the cloth and indigo, Malabar provided pepper, and Sri Lanka exported cinnamon. Malacca received Indian textiles and Red Sea bullion in exchange for Indonesian pepper, mace, nutmeg, cloves, and Chinese silk and porcelain. Another route connected East Africa to the Indian Ocean, trading slaves, ebony, ivory, and gold for cloth, beads, and food. Horses, pearls, Persian silk, and carpets traveled from Hadramawt and the Persian Gulf via Hormuz. Bengal exported cloth and food to the Bay of Bengal, while Coromandel supplied yarn and textiles. Sri Lanka provided precious stones and cinnamon, while Pegu exported gems and metals in exchange for cloth. Indian traders maintained a strong presence in Southeast Asia by the late 15th century.

India also exported cheap textiles and coarse fabrics for everyday use across Asia. Staple food items—rice, wheat, pulses, oil, and ghee—were significant exports, meeting the demands of the Indian Ocean region. Surplus grain from Bengal, Orissa, and the Kanara coast not only supplied India's coastal regions but also fed cities like Malacca, Hormuz, and Aden. These developments challenge J.C. Van Leur's thesis that late medieval Indian Ocean trade primarily involved luxury goods. While luxury trade was significant, bulk goods, foodstuffs, and bullion also played a vital role, as argued by Meilink Roelofz, Ashin Das Gupta, M.N. Pearson, Sushil Chaudhury, and Michel Morineau.

The Portuguese did impact Indian overseas trade, especially in Gujarat, but Van Leur maintained that Asian maritime trade retained its importance in the 16th century. He argued that the Portuguese could not dominate even the pepper and spice trade. Niels Steinsgaard noted that black pepper and spice exports to Europe did not substantially increase until the Dutch and English East India Companies entered the trade in the early 17th century. C.R. Boxer observed that Gujarati ships transported more pepper from Acheh to the Red Sea in the late 16th century than the Portuguese shipped from the Cape to Lisbon. According to L.F. Thomaz, Portuguese exports of cloves to Europe throughout the 16th century amounted to only one-tenth of the total

production in the Moluccas. Thus, the Portuguese played only a limited role in the overall Asian spice trade.

17.3.2 Europeans in the Indian Ocean

During the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century, Indian maritime trade expanded significantly compared to the 16th century. A key aspect of this period was the increasing importance of the Red Sea trade for India's overseas commerce. This growth was driven by the combined efforts of Indian maritime merchants and European traders, particularly the Dutch, English, and French. The thriving spice market in Europe, along with the substantial profits earned by the Portuguese, led to the establishment of the English East India Company in 1600 CE, followed by the Dutch East India Company in 1602 CE and the French East India Company in 1664 CE. Other companies, like the Ostend, Swedish, and Danish Companies, entered the trade on a smaller scale in the early 18th century. However, the Dutch and English East India Companies dominated the trade, controlling the largest share of commercial activity in the Indian Ocean.

17.3.3 Items Exported from India

The Dutch and English primarily sought pepper and other spices from India, though they eventually sourced pepper from the Spice Islands in the Indonesian archipelago instead of Malabar and Kanara. This led to a temporary shift in European trade focus from India to the Indonesian archipelago. However, the European companies soon realized that the real demand in the Spice Islands was not for silver but for inexpensive Indian textiles. As a result, they turned their attention to India, particularly the Coromandel Coast, to acquire cheap calicoes for exchange in the Indonesian archipelago. When trade along the Coromandel Coast became unstable due to wars, famines, and political unrest, their focus shifted to Bengal.

Bengal offered several advantages for trade, being a major producer of affordable cotton textiles, high-quality raw silk, and saltpetre, all of which were highly valued in Europe. These factors led the Dutch and English to establish factories in

Bengal during the early 17th century, though Bengal trade only gained significant importance after the 1670s. A major surge in Bengal's raw silk exports occurred during this period, followed by an even larger boom in textile exports from the early 1680s. This transformation made Bengal the primary hub of European trade in Asia, primarily driven by the Dutch and English. However, after the British victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 CE, the English East India Company aggressively eliminated European and Asian competitors from the region.

By the early 18th century, Bengal accounted for around 40% of the Dutch company's annual Asian commodity exports to Holland and over 50% of its total textile exports from Asia. This made Bengal the most significant trading center for both the Dutch and the English East India Companies. The English traders often referred to Bengal as "the best flower of the Company's garden" or "the choicest jewel." While other regions like the Coromandel Coast, Gujarat, and Malabar also engaged in trade, Bengal emerged as the dominant trading center. The intra-Asian trade, once controlled by the Portuguese, was largely taken over by the Dutch, while both the Dutch and English promoted direct Euro-Asian trade with much greater enthusiasm than the Portuguese had.

The 17th century marked a major shift in the nature of Euro-Asian trade. While the Dutch were heavily involved in intra-Asian trade, the English focused more on direct Euro-Asian trade. Indian calicoes from Gujarat, Coromandel, and later Bengal played a crucial role in acquiring spices from the Indonesian archipelago. Bengal raw silk became the main export to Japan, while opium dominated exports to the eastern archipelago.

In the latter half of the 17th century and the early 18th century, the Dutch led in European exports from Asia, but the English caught up by the century's end. The English surpassed the Dutch by the mid-1720s, though the Dutch trade revived in the 1740s, almost matching the English again. By the 1730s, the French also emerged as a strong competitor.

Key export items from India included textiles, raw silk, and saltpetre. The Dutch particularly focused on exporting opium to Batavia. Indigo, once highly valued, was later replaced by Bengal raw silk and saltpetre. Among all exports, textiles remained the most significant commodity, with demand driven more by fashion trends in Europe than by cost considerations.

17.3.4 Imports into India

The primary imports to India were precious metals, particularly silver. During the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century, Indo-European trade was characterized by a "bullion-for-goods" system. Though some other items, like broadcloth, woollens, and non-precious metals, were imported, their quantity and value were relatively minor. Precious metals constituted 87.5% of the total value of goods imported into Bengal. Similarly, for the English East India Company, around 75% of their total imports into the East Indies consisted of treasure, with this proportion ranging between 90% and 94% in Bengal during the early 18th century.

This pattern remained largely unchanged until the mid-18th century. However, the influx of bullion nearly ceased after the British conquest of Bengal in 1757 CE, as the English East India Company began financing its trade using Bengal's resources. The investments of other European companies declined, and any remaining trade was financed through private English merchants and company servants, who received bills of exchange in Europe for their investments.

Notably, Europeans were not the sole importers of bullion. Asian merchants, whose exports from Bengal surpassed those of the Europeans, also brought in silver to pay for their purchases. One crucial aspect of this trade was that the balance of trade consistently favored India.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 In the medieval times, Asian trade was founded on which four great products of eastern civilization?
- Q.2 Name the two city ports that flourished in China as per the accounts of

travelers Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta.

- Q.3 Which period has been called as the last flowering of Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean?
- Q.4 Name the historian who argued that in the 16th century, the real change in the Indian Ocean was brought about not so much by the presence of Portuguese as by the rise of the Mughals, the Safavids and the Ottoman in the western Indian Ocean.
- Q.5 Name a factor which encouraged the establishment of the English and Dutch Companies in India.
- Q.6 Name any one item of export from India to Europe.
- Q.7 What revolutionized the pattern of the Asiatic trade of the European Companies?
- Q.8 What was called as 'the best flower of the Company's garden' or 'the choicest jewel' by the English factors?
- Q.9 What was the chief item of the Dutch export to Batavia?
- Q.10 What were the chief items of imports to India from Europe?

17.4 Summary (Rephrased)

- During medieval times, oceanic trade facilitated extensive interaction between Europe and Asia, significantly influencing their societies, economies, and political structures.
- Following the rise of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, Arab seafarers and merchants dominated maritime trade for nearly three centuries, connecting the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean trade routes.
- From the 11th century onward, Europeans gradually replaced Arabs as the leading maritime traders, with Italian merchants pioneering this transition.
- The Portuguese later emerged as prominent leaders in overseas trade, establishing India as a key hub for their commercial activities in Asia.
- The Portuguese were the first Europeans to secure dominance over the Indian Ocean, making India the focal point of their trading operations.

- Indian merchants also held a significant share in maritime trade from the 15th century onward. During the 17th century, intense competition emerged between the Dutch and the British for control of Asian and European oceanic trade.
- Key exports to Europe included spices, raw silk, rice, and various fruits, followed by indigo, saltpeter, cotton and silk textiles, and sugar.
- In return, Europeans imported primarily woolens, a few luxury goods, and mainly bullion into India, maintaining a favorable trade balance for India.
- Asian merchants continued to dominate Indian exports, surpassing the trade volumes handled by European companies.

17.5 Glossary

Archipelago: A sea or stretch of water having many islands.

Bullion: Gold or silver in bulk before coining, or valued by weight.

Calico: Cotton cloth especially with a coloured pattern printed on one side.

Exotic: Originating in or characteristic of a distant foreign country.

Porcelain: A hard, shiny substance made by heating clay. It is used for preparing cups, plates and ornaments.

17.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 Silk, porcelain, sandalwood and black pepper.

Ans.2 Hangchow and Zaiton

Ans.3 The initial years of the 15th century.

Ans.4 Ashin Das Gupta

Ans.5 Big market for spices in Europe and the huge return derived from it by the Portuguese.

Ans.6 Spices, especially pepper.

Ans.7 Big boom in the export of Bengal textiles from the early 1680s.

Ans.8 Bengal trade

Ans.9 Opium

Ans.10 Bullion

17.7 Suggested Readings

1. **Chaudhuri, K. N.** - Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
2. **Chaudhary, Sushil** - Companies, Commerce and Merchants: Bengal in the Pre-Colonial Era, Routledge, 1st Edition, 2016.
3. **Curtin, Philip De Armond et al.** - Cross-Cultural Trade in World History, Cambridge University Press, 1984.
4. **Donkin, Robin A.** - Between East and West: The Moluccas and the Traffic in Spices Up to the Arrival of Europeans, Diane Publishing Company, 2003.
5. **Lach, Donald Frederick** - Asia in the Making of Europe: The Century of Discovery, University of Chicago Press, 1994.

17.8 Terminal Questions

1. How did the rise of Islam shape oceanic trade up to the 10th century?
2. Describe the pattern of European trade from the 11th to the 15th centuries.
3. Provide a brief overview of India's maritime trade during the 15th century.
4. How did the British and Dutch trading companies impact trade in the Indian Ocean?
5. What were the key exports and imports involved in European trade during medieval India?

UNIT-18

MEDIEVAL TRADE AND COMMERCE- II

Structure

18.1 Introduction

18.2 Objectives

18.3 Pattern of Trade

18.3.1 Trade Routes

18.3.2 Centers of Commercial Activities

18.3.3 Commercial Practices

Self-Check Exercise-1

18.4 Summary

18.5 Glossary

18.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

18.7 Suggested Readings

18.8 Terminal Questions

18.1 Introduction

Between 1000 and 1300 CE, Europe witnessed remarkable commercial growth, which historian Carlo M. Cipolla attributes to factors like urbanization, population increase, technological innovations, and the expanded use of currency. Italian merchants emerged as key players, bridging trade between the East and West. By the 10th century, Venice had become a prominent trade hub, connecting the Byzantine East, the Muslim South, and the Catholic West. This expansion of trade routes facilitated the rise of other Italian cities, including Genoa, Pisa, Piacenza, Siena, Florence, and Milan. From the 14th to the 17th centuries, European maritime trade further flourished, with the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean becoming focal points for trade. The Portuguese dominated this period, while major trading companies emerged in England, Holland, and France.

18.2 Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand medieval trade patterns.
- Identify major land and sea trade routes.
- Recognize significant commercial centers of the medieval world.
- Explain the commercial practices that supported trade activities.

18.3 Trade Patterns

During the medieval era, trade encompassed essential goods, luxury items, precious metals, horses, weapons, and slaves. The nature and volume of trade varied by region. India was known for its spices and cotton textiles, while Africa and the Americas supplied gold, silver, and slaves. Arab merchants actively traded horses, slaves, Persian silk, and Mediterranean products like textiles, wine, and grain across Asia and East Africa.

The Byzantine Empire maintained trade with Slavic regions in the 9th century, eventually extending into Russian markets. Byzantium became a hub for luxury goods, particularly perfumes and silk from Constantinople. Western European trade was initially limited to its periphery, with Frisians acting as early intermediaries, primarily along the Rhine River. Scandinavian traders regularly traveled across the central Russian watershed, connecting the Baltic and Black Seas, exporting honey, furs, and slaves while importing spices, textiles, wine, and metal goods.

Italian merchants became prominent in the 10th-century trade landscape, importing silk, velvet, damask, Russian furs, spices, and dyes from the East. These goods were distributed across Western and Central Europe, while Italian merchants exported timber, weapons, woolen goods, and slaves. Initially focused on re-exporting goods, they later established local manufacturing centers.

In Northern Europe, trade revolved around essential commodities like grain, fish, and timber. The Somme and Seine valleys were major grain suppliers, while Prussia and Poland became Europe's primary granaries. Skania in Sweden provided fish to

Western Europe, while Bordeaux emerged as a significant wine trade hub. Timber came from Flanders and the Netherlands, while North German towns facilitated the salt trade, sourcing it from the Bay of Bourgeois.

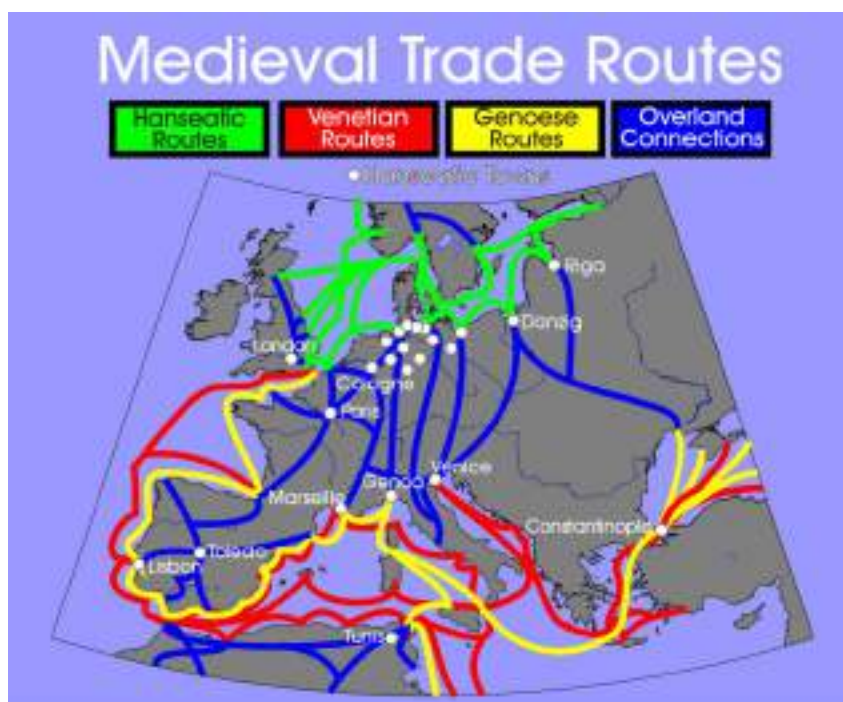
Trade connections also flourished between the Muslim world and Western merchants in Southern Europe. Muslims imported Frankish and Scandinavian swords, timber, iron, tin, and copper, while Europeans bought textiles and spices. Eastern European trade expanded during the 9th and 10th centuries, with Arab merchants frequently reaching Slav territories. The Slavonic states traded slaves, furs, honey, and wax, while Russia became a central trading hub, connecting Slavonic and Baltic regions. By the 12th century, Novgorod had emerged as the primary Baltic trade center, dealing mainly in beeswax, fur, and silver.

Flemish fabrics reached Bohemia, which later imported cloth from Cologne, Aachen, and Mainz. Bohemia also traded with Poland and Hungary, exporting mining products and cattle to Upper Germany, Italy, and Vienna, while Poland exported metals and luxury goods to Bruges during the 13th century.

The Low Countries were another significant trade center. Flanders led the early cloth manufacturing industry but faced competition from Brabant by the 13th century, resulting in middle-quality cloth production. To meet Mediterranean demand, wool was imported from England and Spain. By the 14th century, major trade routes connected the Mediterranean, North Sea, and Baltic regions.

In the Americas, vibrant trade networks existed. The Hurons dominated the fur trade along the Lawrence Valley. Mesoamerica imported turquoise and silver from New Mexico, while the Aztecs traded goods from various regions, including rubber from Vera Cruz, chocolate from Chiapas, jaguar pelts and honey from Yucatan, gold from Nicaragua, and cacao from Honduras and El Salvador. The Mayans traded luxury goods such as leather and animal skins. However, Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule during the 14th and 15th centuries significantly disrupted trade patterns in the Americas and Africa.

While long-distance trade was significant, it remained relatively small compared to local trade, with most Europeans relying on locally produced goods. Water transport played a crucial role in long-distance commerce. For instance, in 1273 CE, England exported 35,000 sacks of wool, while Sweden annually shipped 100,000 tons of herring to Hanseatic towns, importing 24,000 tons of salt in return. The 16th and 17th centuries saw an influx of spices, textiles, indigo, sugar, and saltpetre into Europe, primarily sourced from India and other parts of Asia.



Source: www.acpsd.net

18.3.2 Centers of Commercial Activities

Trade flourished through designated commercial hubs, some of which had roots in ancient times. Historical records from various cultures mention periodic local markets, with some specializing in specific goods while others offered diverse commodities. In India, temporary markets known as haat or penth were widespread and continue to operate today. As settled societies expanded, permanent trade centers emerged

alongside these temporary markets. The rise of urbanization and extensive trade networks further transformed commercial activities. During the medieval period, trading hubs were categorized into markets and fairs.

Markets

The growth of trade during the medieval era led to the proliferation of markets in towns, with larger towns hosting multiple marketplaces. Major European cities like London, Paris, Moscow, Barcelona, Venice, Madrid, Lisbon, Bavaria, Cologne, and Lyons were known for their prominent markets. These markets often developed alongside the towns themselves and specialized in specific products such as grain, fish, meat, cloth, livestock, wine, cheese, fruits, and vegetables. Everitt estimated that, during the 16th and 17th centuries, approximately 800 towns in England and Wales held regular markets.

India also had a thriving market culture. By the late 16th century, there were around 3,200 towns in India, with major trading centers such as Surat, Agra, Lahore, Multan, Patna, Dacca, Delhi, Bijapur, Masulipatnam, Broach, Cambay, and Dindigul actively participating in international trade. Similarly, bustling markets existed in the Arab world, including Aden, Jeddah, Istanbul, Hormuz, Baghdad, Mecca, and Basra. In China, most towns attracted traders from Central Asia, Africa, and India, while Cairo in Egypt boasted over 30 markets. Even Latin America, under European colonization, saw thriving markets in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina.

Medieval trade networks extended across regions, connecting villages, small towns, and major cities. Traders ranged from peddlers and small merchants to large-scale dealers, each specializing in particular goods. Tapan Ray Chaudhuri classified 16th- and 17th-century Indian markets into four types:

1. **Emporia** for long-distance trade (inland, overland, or overseas).
2. **Bazaars and wholesale markets (mandis)** for local consumption.
3. **Periodic fairs**, where traders gathered to sell and restock goods.

4. **Rural markets**, where local surplus was exchanged among producers and consumers.

Similar market structures existed across other medieval regions.

Fairs

Initially linked to religious and ritual festivals, fairs gradually evolved into significant trade centers. They varied in size, attracting participants from local, regional, and international areas. Fairs were held at specific times, ranging from monthly to annual or even once every few years. They often specialized in particular goods, such as slaves, cattle, grains, arms, crafts, and luxury items.

As trade expanded, the link between markets and fairs strengthened. Originally associated with religious celebrations, many fairs gradually transformed into commercial hubs. For instance, the Lendit fair at St. Denis began as a religious gathering but evolved into a major trade fair by the 12th century. Similarly, the Flanders fair at Torhout became a prominent commercial and industrial hub in the 11th century. The Champagne fairs in France attracted merchants from across Europe, including France, Italy, England, Germany, Switzerland, and Savoy, who traded in cloth, wool, silk, leather, spices, sugar, grain, wine, and horses.

After 1250 CE, Genoa emerged as a significant trade center, while fairs like Troyes, Provins, Lagny, and Bar-Sur-Aube attracted merchants from distant regions. Some fairs, such as the Lendit fair (9th century), the Troyes fairs (dating back to Roman times), and the Lyons fair (172 CE), continued for centuries. Most major European towns, including Paris, London, Venice, and Leipzig, hosted renowned fairs. By the 16th century, Antwerp and Bergen-op-Zoom held four major fairs annually.

Fairs often operated as circuits, with merchants traveling from one fair to another. India also hosted significant fairs, many rooted in religious traditions but closely tied to trade. The Kumbh Mela, held every 6 and 12 years, was the largest such fair. Egypt, Syria, and Arabia were known for their fairs, with the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca serving

as a major trading occasion. Hormuz held a seasonal trade fair lasting three to four months, while Alexandria saw peak trading activity during September and October. In East Asia, fairs were common in Bantam (Java) and various Chinese towns, often regulated by the state.

These fairs attracted a wide range of participants, including large merchants, middlemen, small shopkeepers, peddlers, and common people. Merchants traveled long distances based on each fair's size and importance. Antwerp, for instance, hosted two major fairs annually, one famous for its horse trade from Denmark. Fairs also facilitated credit and money markets. Fern and Braudel likened fairs to a pyramid, with local goods forming the base, luxury goods in the middle, and credit transactions at the top.

Credit transactions were integral to fairs, where merchants exchanged bills of exchange and settled debts. Major traders often set currency exchange rates. However, by the 18th century, fairs began to decline as primary trade centers, although many continued as traditional cultural events.

18.3.3 Commercial Practices

The expansion of long-distance trade introduced new complexities and risks. Merchants faced threats from pirates and natural disasters, while substantial capital was required to purchase goods, transport them, and generate profits. These challenges led to the emergence of new commercial practices and institutions.

Credit and Money Lending

Credit systems became central to trade. Wholesalers supplied goods on credit to retailers, who extended the same to consumers. Small traders, middlemen, and suppliers often operated on the edge of financial stability, risking collapse if debts went unpaid. Large commercial transactions were funded by wealthy merchants, and money lending became a specialized activity. In both Europe and India, even nobles engaged in money lending.

In Europe, maritime loans were common. These loans were repaid only if the ship reached its destination safely, resulting in high interest rates. Although the Church banned such loans in 1230 CE, the practice continued through exchange contracts. Italian merchants introduced innovative financial practices, including:

1. **Commenda:** A seasonal partnership where a financier provided capital and a merchant conducted trade.
2. **Colleganza:** A partnership where one merchant provided capital while another participated in trade.

By the late 13th century, the commenda system declined in Genoa, replaced by *compagnia*, a family-based partnership that evolved into *corpi di compagnia*, or corporate capital.

Debt repayment was essential for trade continuity. Merchants often lacked cash and relied on credit, with debts settled during fairs. Written agreements guaranteed repayment. Henry Pirenne described fairs as early clearinghouses for the European economy. In the Netherlands, "fair letters" documented debts, split into two parts, with one held by the magistrate and the other by the creditor. Matching the torn pieces authenticated the debt.

Although the Christian Church prohibited usury, the ban was only partially effective. Jews dominated money lending until the 13th century, often facing resentment for their financial activities. Some Christian groups bypassed the ban, claiming that charging interest on personal loans was sinful but acceptable for business loans. Interest rates varied widely, from 9% to 18% in India, though they could reach 100%, depending on factors like distance, borrower credibility, bargaining power, and trade risks.

Instruments of Exchange, Money Changing, and Banking

Currency played a vital role in trade, with various regions developing unique systems for issuing and exchanging money. In China, the Tang and Sung dynasties

introduced paper money and credit alongside traditional coins. As early as 811 CE, the Tang issued flying cash, money drafts redeemable at the capital. The Sung dynasty expanded this system, facilitating credit transfers among merchants.

Private bankers introduced certificates of deposit, which could be cashed for a 3% service fee. These certificates circulated at face value, with those issued by Chengtu bankers in Szechwan becoming particularly popular. In 1204 CE, the Chinese government adopted this system, creating the world's first genuine paper money, valid for three years.

During Japan's Tokugawa period, daimyo issued rice and silver certificates, effectively functioning as paper money.



Moneychanger

Source:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money_changer

Evolution of Trade, Banking, and Financial Instruments in the Medieval Period

To circumvent the Church's prohibition on usury, the bill of exchange emerged as a vital financial instrument. These bills were issued in one location and redeemed in another, often involving different currencies with fluctuating values. This variation in exchange rates discreetly concealed the interest charged. In India, the most prominent form of exchange was the hundi. The 17th-century traveler Tavernier observed that almost every village had moneychangers and bankers, known as sarraffs, who facilitated money transfers and letters of exchange. Hundis were issued for loans as paper documents, deposits, or remittances and were tradeable. Each hundi specified the transaction amount, the redemption period, and the place of encashment, with interest and associated fees (such as insurance, transmission, or exchange) varying based on the transaction type.

In Europe, bills of exchange became indispensable for trade. They were often bought at a discount and redeemed for up to 5% profit in other towns or branches. The reliability, accessibility, and ease of negotiation determined their quality, while strict codes governed their usage. During the Abbasid Caliphate, such instruments were called *suftaja*, while cheques were known as *saak*.

The 13th century witnessed the expansion of banking institutions, with Italy leading the transformation. Cities like Genoa, Lucca, Florence, Tuscany, Rome, and Venice emerged as prominent banking hubs. Several influential families, including the Bardis and Peruzzis, established banks in Florence and extended their operations to England and across Europe. By 1338 CE, Florence alone had nearly 80 banking houses facilitating transactions throughout the continent. By the late 14th and early 15th centuries, banks established by business houses operated in major European cities. The Medici Bank, one of the most influential, was headquartered in Florence and maintained branches in Rome, Naples, Milan, Pisa, Venice, Geneva, Lyons, Avignon, Bruges, and London. These banks acted as financial agents for the Church, provided credit to monarchs, supported international trade, and extended loans to merchants.

Another significant institution that emerged during the late medieval period was the Stock Exchange, which became central to commercial activity. By 1681 CE, it was

described as a "meeting place for bankers, merchants, businessmen, currency dealers, agents, brokers, and others." By the 16th century, every major European commercial town had an exchange. According to historian Fernand Braudel, these exchanges operated like the top section of a fair but functioned continuously, serving as a hub for prominent businessmen and intermediaries. They facilitated various transactions while functioning as financial, stock, and money markets.

Development of Accounting Practices

The growth of trade necessitated accurate recordkeeping. In European maritime commerce, venture accounting was common, with each shipment managed under a separate account. Scribes played a crucial role, maintaining ship inventories, listing onboard items, and documenting each transaction. Over time, records were organized into individual accounts, forming continuous ledgers. The Peruzzi Ledgers (1335–1343 CE) categorized debts and credits separately. By the 15th century, Italians adopted the double-entry bookkeeping system, creating a structured approach that stabilized monetary transactions.

Self-Check Exercise

1. Who were the earliest intermediaries in North-Western European trade along the Rhine?
2. Name the leading port under the Southern Sung dynasty in China.
3. Identify the chief centers of Baltic trade in the 9th century.
4. Mention any two centers of international trade in 16th-century India.
5. Which fairs at Torhout became a hub of intense commercial and industrial activity in the 11th century?
6. What was Commenda?
7. In which country was the "Fair Letter" exchange mechanism prevalent?
8. What was the Indian term for currency and paper-based transactions?
9. What were moneychangers called in Genoa?
10. What were bills of exchange called during the Abbasid Caliphate?

18.4 Summary

- Medieval commercial transactions involved diverse goods, including spices, textiles, silk, sugar, precious metals, minerals, horses, weapons, slaves, and luxury items.
- European nations established extensive trade networks, connecting regions like India, China, Africa, Latin America, East Asia, and Arabia.
- Regional trade circuits facilitated the movement of goods, supported by a thriving money economy.
- Markets and fairs emerged as key exchange centers, adopting specialized commercial practices.
- Both overland and maritime routes facilitated trade, with advancements in navigation and shipbuilding boosting commerce.
- Expanding trade led to the rise of new financial practices, including money lending and financing.
- Money changing became a specialized service, addressing complexities in multi-national gold and silver currencies.
- Exchange instruments facilitated trade while reducing the need to carry large sums.
- Banking institutions, originating in Italy, became essential for trade operations.
- The stock exchange emerged as a central platform for diverse commercial activities.

18.5 Glossary

Daimyo: A Japanese feudal baron.

Damask: A rich, heavy silk or linen fabric with a pattern woven into it, used for table linen and upholstery.

Galley: A long flat ship with sails.

Nobles: High officials of the state.

Parchment: The skin of sheep, goats, etc., prepared for use as a writing material.

Pontoon bridge: Also known as floating bridge, this type of bridge uses floats or shallow draft boats to support a continuous deck for pedestrian and vehicle travel.

Usury: The practice of lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest.

18.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Ans.1 Frisians

Ans.2 Chuan-Chou

Ans.3 Dorstad, Haithabu and Birka

Ans.4 Surat and Agra

Ans.5 Flanders fairs

Ans.6 A periodic partnership for one season was called as Commenda. It was a partnership settled between a financier and a merchant.

Ans.7 Netherlands

Ans.8 Hundi

Ans.9 Bancherii

Ans.10 Suftaja

18.7 Suggested Readings

1. **Abu-Lughod, Janet.** Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
2. **Crouzet, F.** A History of the European Economy, 1000–2000. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2001.
3. **Lopez, R. S.** The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950–1350. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
4. **Lopez, Robert S. & Irving W. Raymond.** Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World: Illustrative Documents Translated with Introductions and Notes. New York: Columbia University Press, 1955.
5. **North, D. C., & Thomas, R. P.** The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
6. **Pirenne, H.** Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe. London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1936.

7. **Pounds, N. J. G.** An Economic History of Medieval Europe. New York, NY: Longman, 1988.

18.8 Terminal Questions

1. Provide a brief overview of the trade patterns in the medieval world.
2. Describe the prominent trade routes used during medieval times.
3. Analyze the development of markets during the medieval period.
4. What role did fairs play in facilitating trade during the medieval era?
5. How did merchants secure funds for their trading ventures?
6. Write short notes on:
 - (i) Credit and Money Lending
 - (ii) Accounting

UNIT-19

TRANSITION TO MODERN WORLD-I

Structure

19.1 Introduction

19.2 Objectives

19.3 Meaning of Modern world

19.3.1 Decay of Feudalism

19.3.2 Transformation of Political Structures

19.3.3 Trading Activities

Self-Check Exercise-1

19.4 Summary

19.5 Glossary

19.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

19.7 Suggested Readings

19.8 Terminal Questions

19.1 Introduction

Historians regard the period around 1500 CE as a significant turning point marking the shift from the medieval to the modern era. This transformation primarily affected European society due to several key events that reshaped Europe. However, the impact was not limited to Europe alone. Many ideas and advancements were borrowed from non-European civilizations, particularly the Arabs and the Chinese. Over the following 500 years, the integration of different world regions influenced lives globally. From the late 15th century onward, Europe began its ascent to dominance. The decline of feudalism brought changes in agrarian structures, making them more responsive to market forces. Geographical factors further empowered Europe's maritime states.

Profound changes occurred in Asia and Africa as well, following the disruption of the traditional monopolies held by the Italians in the Levant and the Arabs in the Indian Ocean, brought about by the discovery of new sea routes around Africa. The

emergence of trans-Atlantic trade routes connected trading networks worldwide, marking the initial stage of global integration. Empire-building further fueled capitalism, driven by competition and exploitation. Politically, decentralized states evolved into centralized structures, not only in Europe but also in China, India, and Turkey. These centralized systems facilitated trade and economic growth.

19.2 Objectives

Upon completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the concept of the modern world.
- Analyze the factors behind the decline of feudalism.
- Examine the transformation from decentralized to centralized political structures across major world regions.
- Assess how new trade routes contributed to the rise of the modern world.

19.3 Understanding the Modern World

Modernization refers to the process of adopting reforms and innovations to address contemporary challenges. It encompasses transformations in political and economic structures, along with the development of rational and scientific approaches within society. The modern world marks a shift from agrarian economies to industrial and capitalist systems, driven by continuous advancements in administration, law, economy, society, religion, and intellectual thought.

Different societies, including the Europeans, Chinese, Indians, and Arabs, contributed uniquely to shaping modern civilization, each following its own path to modernization. The discovery of sea routes by explorers such as Christopher Columbus, Bartholomew Diaz, and Vasco da Gama during the late 15th century was the culmination of centuries of progress, with Arab and Chinese civilizations leading the way until then.

Marshall Hodgson, in his book *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in the World Civilization*, situates Islamic civilization within the broader context of world history. He challenges the Eurocentric narrative of modernization, presenting it as a global phenomenon rather than an exclusively Western achievement. Hodgson asserts that modernity did not begin with the Renaissance but instead elevated Europe to the cultural standards already established by other major civilizations, largely through the incorporation of Asian advancements.

Modernization did not begin simultaneously worldwide. While Europe emerged from feudalism, Chinese and Arabian civilizations had already achieved considerable progress. After the 15th century, however, non-European regions experienced stagnation for various reasons, while Europe led global change through scientific innovations, trade, and imperialism. This era marked the end of regional isolation as civilizations engaged in direct and accelerating contact across oceans. From the 19th century onward, industrialization further accelerated change, compelling non-European societies to adopt reforms to defend against imperialism and secure a respectable global standing.

19.3.1 Decay of Feudalism

The decline of feudalism was a gradual process, unfolding over nearly three centuries before capitalism gained dominance. The earliest regions to experience feudal decline included England, the Netherlands, northwestern Europe, and parts of France. In contrast, feudalism persisted and even strengthened in eastern and central Europe after the 17th-century crisis. This transition resulted from multiple factors, including demographic changes, trade expansion, internal contradictions within the feudal system, and class conflicts.

Northwestern Europe gained prominence along the new Atlantic trade routes in the 16th century, although the feudal order had already begun to weaken earlier. Population growth and excessive exploitation of peasants created an agricultural crisis. Medieval agricultural inefficiency, rising revenue demands, feudal restrictions, war expenses, increasing prices, and demographic pressure all contributed to the crisis. The

emergence of a global market further undermined feudal structures, compelling agriculture to adapt to market forces.

The feudal crisis led to profound social changes, although the pace varied across regions. The lower classes gained more freedom and security as monetary payments gradually replaced traditional feudal dues. Rising agricultural costs, urbanization, and population growth accelerated agricultural commercialization. Enterprising landlords benefited, while traditional feudatories faced challenges. As the feudal aristocracy declined, a commercial economy emerged, fostering the rise of the bourgeoisie.

The increased demand for agricultural produce expanded cultivated areas and improved yields. The prevalent three-field system in late medieval Europe was enhanced through innovative cropping methods. The practice of leaving land fallow was abandoned, and new crops such as peas, beans, turnips, green vegetables, and fodder were introduced. Similar advancements occurred in China. Robert Temple credits China for innovations like crop rotation, seed drilling, and intensive weeding. The European agrarian revolution drew heavily from these ideas. Arab contributions were equally significant, with the Umayyad and early Abbasid rulers initiating extensive irrigation projects in the Tigris-Euphrates region ("Sawad" or Black Land). The Arabs introduced crops such as rice, sugarcane, cotton, saffron, spinach, and various fruits to Spain and subsequently to other parts of Europe.

Both China and Arabia demonstrated governmental interest in large-scale agricultural projects, including flood control, artificial irrigation, and efficient transportation of agricultural produce. Chinese advancements included the square pallet chain pump, swan-neck hoe for weeding, rotator winnowing fan, and multi-tube seed drills. Innovations in soil conservation, crop improvement, and canal linkages further enhanced productivity. However, these changes were gradual rather than revolutionary.

In contrast, Europe's agrarian transformation was more extensive, influencing trade, manufacturing, social structures, and economies across regions. European agricultural advancements facilitated trade beyond national boundaries. The Baltic

region became Europe's granary, exporting food grains via sea routes. The Low Countries and the Netherlands specialized in dairy farming, while Spain, England, and the Alpine regions focused on sheep farming, exporting wool to production centers like Flanders.

By the late 15th and early 16th centuries, extensive drainage and dam-building projects were undertaken across Europe. Land reforms became widespread, and land enclosures became common. Market-driven transitions shifted agriculture from arable farming to extensive grazing. Economic factors increasingly shaped agrarian practices. The 16th-century Price Revolution played a crucial role in transforming European agriculture by promoting capitalist farming and accelerating feudal decline. This economic shift reshaped class structures and laid the foundation for modern agriculture.

Although feudalism persisted in many parts of Europe, agrarian change gained momentum from the late 15th century. Regional specialization, previously of minor importance during the Middle Ages, became central to agricultural production. Farmers and landlords adopted new strategies for selling and exporting agricultural products to increase income. The establishment of printing presses across Europe facilitated the dissemination of agricultural knowledge, promoting innovative practices through manuals and literature.

Ultimately, the decline of feudalism marked the beginning of a new era characterized by capitalist farming, social transformation, and economic growth. While feudal structures persisted in some regions for centuries, the 16th-century agrarian revolution marked a decisive shift toward modern agricultural practices, shaping the trajectory of European society and economy.

19.3.2 Transformation of Political Structures

The transformation of political structures marked a significant shift in global history, evident across Europe, East and South Asia, and the Arab world.

Rise of Centralized States in Europe

By the late 15th century, Europe was governed through various systems, including hereditary, elective, and joint monarchies, oligarchies, confederations, and empires. Despite this diversity, the political framework remained fundamentally feudal. However, the emergence of strong centralized monarchies in regions like France, Spain, England, and Muscovy (modern Russia) began to reshape the continent toward modernity. The decline of the feudal economy and the impact of civil wars facilitated this transformation, altering the dynamics between society and state-building.

With the rise of powerful monarchs, the coercive authority of local lords over the peasantry diminished as the state monopolized the use of force. This centralization gradually reduced the influence of feudal lords, towns, corporate groups, and even the Church. In Western Europe, the emergence of absolutist states led to the absorption of smaller territories, forming modern nation-states with defined boundaries. Russia exemplifies this transformation, evolving from the principality of Muscovy into a vast empire through territorial expansion. Spain experienced a similar process, consolidating power under a single sovereign, establishing law and order, and implementing unified governance.

Absolute monarchies promoted territorial consolidation, administrative centralization, and political integration. They unified state economies through centralized taxation and maintained control with professional bureaucracies, judicial systems, and standing armies. The development of modern administrative, judicial, and financial structures can be traced back to this era. Although interpretations of European absolutism vary, it is generally accepted that these states played a progressive role in facilitating the rise of capitalism.

These states primarily functioned as tax collectors and redistributors of private wealth. While rooted in feudalism, they protected the interests of the emerging trading and manufacturing classes by removing internal trade barriers, regulating external tariffs to support local industries, encouraging colonial expansion, and establishing trading

companies. In doing so, absolute rulers accelerated the accumulation of capital and laid the groundwork for capitalism. Moreover, these autocratic regimes paved the way for modern nation-states founded on the principle of sovereignty.

Key events furthered this transformation. The English Civil War (1642–1649 CE) dismantled the feudal state, empowering the landed gentry and bourgeoisie. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 CE established constitutional governance, while the French Revolution of 1789 CE dismantled the feudal system and promoted capitalist development. France transitioned from a medieval state to a modern nation-state, embracing reforms that popularized the ideals of equality, liberty, citizenship, and sovereignty worldwide.

The Reformation movement also advanced state-building by establishing national churches, strengthening rulers' authority, and promoting ideas of political rights and individual freedom. Secular authority gradually replaced medieval Christianity.

Though the Italian city-states did not develop into absolutist states, they significantly shaped modern international relations and diplomacy. Italian courts became political hubs during the 15th century, with rulers adopting the concept of *stato*, a model emulated across Europe. Italian princes introduced the practice of "resident diplomacy," including the appointment of resident ambassadors, formation of strategic alliances, non-aggression pacts, and commercial treaties. Their most notable contribution was the balance of power principle, where states ensured no single power dominated others. This principle resurfaced during the Cold War and the anti-French alliance against Napoleon.

Political Transformation in East and South Asia

In East Asia, China remained relatively isolated from the outside world, except for neighboring states. From the 11th century onward, Chinese ships ventured across the Malay Peninsula and India to Arabia. However, the Ming Dynasty later imposed trade restrictions, allowing commerce only with states acknowledging Chinese suzerainty. Trade was viewed primarily as a source of taxation.

The "Age of Discovery" brought significant change. In the 16th century, Portuguese and Spanish incursions into southern China introduced traders and missionaries. Russian advances across Siberia in the 17th century further ended China's isolation, triggering a series of changes. By the mid-19th century, direct East-West contact led to conflicts like the Sino-British Wars. This period coincided with the rise of the Manchus and the establishment of the Qing (Ching) dynasty, marking a distinct departure from earlier eras.

While European contact began in the 16th century, its impact became significant only in the 19th century, when China implemented extensive political, administrative, and economic reforms to counter Western imperialism. Historians differ on when modern China began. One school considers the Opium War (1839–42 CE) as the turning point, marking the start of foreign imperialism and subsequent reforms. This period also saw Japan's Meiji Restoration, transforming it into a modern nation.

Conversely, many Chinese scholars view the arrival of European explorers and missionaries during the Ming-Qing transition as the true beginning of modern China. Western education, introduced during this period, accelerated societal transformation. Western influence acted as a catalyst for change, though China never fully adopted the capitalist model. The country retained its traditional identity until the 1911 Revolution, with only gradual administrative reforms. Throughout this period, China remained a centralized empire, adapting its governance structure to address Western challenges through a series of reform movements.

In South Asia, political structures were diverse, shaped by cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic variety. Despite this complexity, the Indian subcontinent held a prominent position in global trade when the Portuguese arrived. While Arab traders nominally controlled the Indian Ocean trade, real power lay with diverse ethnic and religious merchant groups trading commodities like cotton, silk, and spices. However, these traders had little influence on state administration, and the Mughals failed to anticipate the Portuguese threat.

The Mughal Empire fostered cultural synthesis, blending Indian and Persian traditions. However, its centralized structure began to fragment in the late 17th century, giving rise to autonomous regional states. This political transformation coincided with the emergence of the British as significant competitors. By the mid-20th century, European powers had gained control over the entire region.

In the 19th century, the first wave of modernization in South Asia manifested in two distinct responses. One approach advocated adopting Western scientific, technological, political, and liberal ideals through social reform movements. The other emphasized the superiority of ancient indigenous culture and sought a revival of past glory. Despite challenges like mass poverty, colonial suppression, and social inequality, the region exhibited remarkable flexibility in embracing Western knowledge. The spread of the national movement and political reforms under British rule further shaped democratic governance.

Transformation in the Arab States

The political, economic, and cultural transformation of the Arab world began under the Abbasid dynasty, which lasted until 1258 CE. After the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Islamic world fragmented into distinct political and regional entities. Despite this division, the Arabic language, Islamic faith, and intellectual traditions remained unifying factors. The Caliphate split into three major regions: Iraq and Iran, Egypt with Syria and Palestine, and North Africa, including parts of Spain. Sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shia Muslims occasionally resulted in significant political conflicts.

During the Arab world's political fragmentation, two external powers—the Ottomans and the British—expanded into the region. The rise of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the Near East brought several Arabian territories under its control. Ottoman expansion began in the 15th century, with the Turks establishing dominance in Turkey and extending into the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. By 1517 CE, they had conquered Hijaz, previously under Mamluk rule from Egypt. Syria and Egypt fell to the Ottomans in 1516–17 CE, while the Persian invasion of 1535 CE resulted in the

occupation of Baghdad. This marked the start of a prolonged and costly struggle for dominance. Yemen became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1538 CE, though the Ottomans withdrew in 1635 CE following conflict with the Zaydis.

The 17th century saw increased British commercial activity in the region. Aden, strategically located on the southwest coast of the Arabian Peninsula, linked Eastern and Western trade routes. However, the discovery of the direct sea route to India in 1498 CE diminished Aden's importance. The Ottoman occupation further worsened its fortunes. In 1618 CE, the British established a trading factory at Mukha (Mokha), followed by similar ventures by the Dutch and French. After the Seven Years' War, Britain secured dominance over the Red Sea in 1763 CE, facing competition from American merchants after 1785 CE.

Napoleon's capture of Egypt in 1798 CE marked a significant turning point. He introduced an Arabic printing press in Cairo, establishing Matba'at Bulaq, the government's official printing institution. He also founded an académie littéraire with a library. This Western encounter sparked intellectual awakening among the otherwise conventional Arab populace. Napoleon's invasion and the subsequent establishment of a Westernized dynasty in Egypt attracted Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals, making Egypt the hub of the Arabic Renaissance (Annahdah al-Adabiyah). This 19th-century literary movement aimed to create modern Arabic literature.

Following the Ottoman Empire's dissolution after World War I, the Arabic Renaissance spread across the Arab world. The movement also spurred British political engagement beyond trade. Arab responses reflected a complex duality: resisting Western political domination while adopting European ideas and techniques. Nationalism, democracy, and self-determination became prominent ideologies.

The Egyptian occupation of Syria (1831–40 CE) further fueled Arab nationalism, uniting the region under the idea of a shared national identity. Inspired by Western ideas, Syrian intellectuals led the movement. In the early 20th century, European powers imposed mandates over Arab territories, with Britain controlling Palestine and Iraq, while

France governed Syria and Lebanon. These interventions fractured the Arab world into smaller nation-states, starting with the formation of Saudi Arabia in 1927 CE. By the 1960s and 1970s, British withdrawals facilitated further fragmentation. The Arab states' transition to modern governance thus differed significantly from the Western model, marked by a revolutionary break from the past.

19.3.3 Trading Activities

Expansion of Global Trade

The rise of the modern world saw a significant increase in trading activities, with maritime trade becoming the backbone of intercontinental commerce. East Asia and the Arab world played crucial roles in expanding and sustaining this global trade network.

Europe's Emergence as a Trade Hub

The growth of modern trade and the commercial economy was closely linked to 15th-century maritime explorations and the discovery of new territories. Before this period, European trade with Asia primarily relied on overland routes. Italian merchants imported spices such as pepper, cinnamon, and mace, alongside silk and cotton fabrics from India and other eastern regions. These goods were transported to Europe, while African regions provided gold and precious stones in exchange for European products.

However, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in eastern Europe disrupted these traditional trade routes. Combined with the impact of the Crusades, this led Europeans to seek new sea routes to Asia, with Portugal and Spain spearheading the effort. Christopher Columbus's discovery of America in 1492 CE marked a significant step toward global integration, strengthening European economies. Similarly, Vasco da Gama's discovery of a sea route to India in 1498 CE paved the way for European imperialism in Asia and Africa. Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation of the earth further demonstrated the potential of oceanic travel, transforming seas into pathways for trade and exploration.

Europe's dominance in the emerging global economy was fueled by these newly established sea routes. Maritime trade became the primary mode of international commerce, increasing trade volumes and diversifying commodities. This economic transformation marked a significant turning point in human history. For instance, the discovery of the silver mines at Potosi in Central America had far-reaching global implications. European maritime superiority, combined with the use of firearms in trade, enabled them to dominate global trading networks, making trade a powerful tool for expansion and modernization.

The transformation of Europe was multifaceted, involving both rapid advancements and gradual adaptations. Long-distance trade stimulated the shipping industry and strengthened merchant marines. Historians like Fernand Braudel, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Eric R. Wolf emphasize how these developments also spurred population migrations. While Asia and Africa, already densely populated, saw limited migration, the Americas and the West Indies attracted Europeans seeking new opportunities. Portuguese settlers moved to Brazil, while millions of Spaniards migrated to Central and South America and the West Indies. This wave was soon followed by Dutch, English, French, and German settlers seeking wealth, social mobility, and freedom from religious persecution. Missionaries also traveled abroad to spread their faith.

Cultural and Biological Exchange

European migration to the Americas facilitated the exchange of crops, animals, and diseases, an interaction Alfred W. Crosby described as the "biological consequences." This exchange led to the globalization of biological systems. Colonial trade introduced new agricultural products to Europe, including tomatoes, cocoa, tobacco, potatoes, maize, and peanuts, which helped address food shortages. For instance, maize and potatoes became staple crops in many European regions, with potatoes replacing traditional grains like rye and millet. Tomatoes also became integral to global cuisines. Conversely, Asian products such as tea, coffee, rice, ginger, and black pepper were introduced to the New World.

However, this exchange also had negative consequences. Migration facilitated the spread of diseases, with Europe facing outbreaks of yellow fever and syphilis. Meanwhile, smallpox, measles, chickenpox, and bubonic plague devastated indigenous populations in the Americas. Smallpox, introduced in 1518 CE, caused significant demographic losses, which some historians term as "bacteriological warfare."

The exchange of animals further transformed economies and lifestyles in both regions. Yet, European expansion also had dehumanizing effects, most notably the transatlantic slave trade. Thousands of Africans and some Asians were forcibly taken from their homelands, often through abduction and violence, and sold into slavery. Many perished during sea voyages or succumbed to harsh conditions in foreign lands. The Enlightenment of the 18th century eventually fueled strong opposition to these practices, leading to movements against slavery.

Impact on Knowledge and Economy

The discovery of new territories expanded geographical and cosmographical knowledge, challenging outdated beliefs about the earth's shape and distances. This period saw the emergence of new literature on these subjects, promoting a unified global understanding. The expansion of world trade not only strengthened the commercial economy but also contributed to the rise of the bourgeoisie while hastening the decline of feudalism. By the 16th century, the world economy had grown significantly, accelerating trade and production while increasingly leaning toward capitalism, except in regions like Russia and China.

Trading Activities in East Asia

For centuries, China maintained limited trade with the West, although Chinese goods reached Europe through Arab intermediaries. During Marco Polo's travels to China in the late 13th century, significant quantities of Chinese silk, textiles, porcelain, and other goods reached Asia, East Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and even coastal Europe via sea routes and caravans. However, commercial activity across

Eurasia declined between the early 14th and late 15th centuries. Marco Polo's accounts of Asia's wealth and luxuries inspired European explorers and traders.

While Europeans explored new sea routes, China faced internal political and economic challenges under the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Despite this, Chinese goods remained highly valued in European and Middle Eastern markets. The arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and their trading posts in Asia increased access to Chinese products, such as porcelain, which was now reaching Lisbon and Antwerp in large quantities. By the 17th century, the Dutch also began importing Chinese luxury goods. In return, China primarily sought silver from Europeans due to population pressures, rising monetary challenges, and declining domestic production.

Chinese trade was strictly regulated by the state, although policies were somewhat relaxed during the 15th century to encourage silver mining. However, increased silver production in Central Europe between 1460 and 1530 CE stimulated economic activity across Western Eurasia, facilitating the purchase of oriental goods, especially Chinese products. The discovery of silver mines in Central and South America further boosted the international circulation of silver bullion. Silver reached China through three primary routes:

1. From Acapulco (Mexico) to Manila (Philippines).
2. From Spanish colonies in America to Portugal, which facilitated trade with Asia.
3. From other European countries, including the Dutch, English, and French.

The political unification of Japan in the late 16th and early 17th centuries further increased silver production, strengthening trade between China and Japan. Portuguese traders also participated, boosting trade volumes. The Portuguese entry into China via Macao in 1557 CE opened the region to other European traders. Trade between Spain and Manila proved profitable for China, as it facilitated the steady export of silk to the New World.

However, increased foreign trade and silver imports also caused economic instability in China, including monetary fluctuations, urbanization, and business

speculation. While foreign trade continued, its volume declined by the 18th century. By the 19th century, China's trade balance shifted unfavorably with the arrival of British traders, who began selling opium as a substitute for silver. This aggressive trade approach marked the beginning of Western imperialism in China. In response, China initiated modernization efforts, adopting Western science and technology while preserving its cultural heritage.

Trading Activities of the Arabs

During the medieval period, the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean were among the world's most prosperous trading zones, primarily connected by Arab traders. Most maritime trade between these regions passed through the Red Sea, with trade routes shifting between the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea depending on political conditions. Cairo emerged as a major trade and manufacturing hub, maintaining active trade relations with Italian states.

While Egypt and Persia dominated maritime trade along the East African coast, neither maintained permanent fleets in the Indian Ocean. Ming China was more powerful but began withdrawing from the region. The arrival of the Portuguese disrupted Arab maritime dominance, though Arab control persisted until the early 18th century. In 1513 CE, Portuguese governor Albuquerque attempted but failed to capture Aden, a key trading port at the mouth of the Red Sea. However, the Portuguese later seized Ormuz, strategically located on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf. They allied with Persia against the Ottoman Empire, exploiting religious differences between the two.

Unlike Europeans, the Portuguese did not establish entirely new trade routes in Asia but rather dominated existing ones using naval power. Asian trade routes had long connected East Africa, the Arabian coast, India, Southeast Asia, and China. Initially, the Portuguese participated in these networks before asserting dominance. As a result, Arab trade shifted westward. Iranian silk gained prominence as the Italian silk industry declined and Chinese trade contracted. From the mid-14th century, Tabriz replaced

Baghdad as a major trading hub, though Basra eventually emerged as an important silk center.

Gradually, the Arab region lost its prominence in global trade until the construction of the Suez Canal in the 19th century restored its strategic importance. The discovery of oil further revitalized the region's role in modern trade networks.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 What do you understand by the word 'modernization'?
- Q.2 Explain the term 'Modern World'.
- Q.3 What were the factors that resulted in the transition from medieval to modern world?
- Q.4 What was Stato?
- Q.5 What has been regarded as the catalyst that transformed traditional China into a modern nation?
- Q.6 Which dynasty brought about the cultural transformation of the Arab states?
- Q.7 Name the literary movement of the 19th century, aimed at creating modern Arabic literature.
- Q.8 Which discovery marked the beginning of the European imperialism in Asia and Africa?
- Q.9 What do you understand by the term 'biological consequences'?
- Q.10 What is 'bacteriological warfare'?

Q.11 Whose accounts of the Asian wealth drew the attention of many sea voyagers and traders?

Q.12 Name the 14th century Arabian city which has been the trading emporium of the Asian goods.

19.5 Summary

- By the late 15th century, Europe had undergone significant transformation compared to the mid-14th century.
- The economy became more complex, with emerging trade networks and manufacturing patterns, marking the dawn of modernity.
- The feudal structure began to break down in certain regions, resulting in agrarian changes.
- This decline of feudalism led to the rise of centralized states under absolute rulers, fostering conditions for capitalist development.
- Additionally, constitutional reforms and popular revolutions gave birth to liberal democratic frameworks, though their forms varied across different states.
- The establishment of new trade routes and long-distance trade contributed to the emergence of a modern world order.
- The growth of international trade further weakened the feudal system, expanded Europe's economy through commerce and manufacturing, and propelled it toward capitalism.

19.6 Glossary

Amerindians: The natives of America who were called Indians or red Indians.

Capitalist: A person who has capital especially invested in business industrial capitalists broadly.

Cosmography: The branch of science which deals with the general features of the universe, including the earth.

Demographic: Relating to the structure of populations.

Maritime: Connected with the sea, especially in relation to seaborne trade or naval matters.

Suez Canal: The Suez Canal is an artificial waterway in Egypt extending from Port Said to Suez and connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea.

19.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Self-Check Exercise-1

Ans.1 The word 'modernization means making suitable changes and bringing reforms to meet the present day challenges. It comprises changes in political and economic structures and to develop social attitudes based on rationality and scientific approach.

Ans.2 Modern World can be explained as the transition from agrarian to the industrial and the capitalist stage.

Ans.3 A combination of factors-demographic, trade, inner contradiction in the feudal mode of production and class conflict, resulted in the transition from medieval to modern world.

Ans.4 In Italy, the concentration of power in the hands of the rulers was called as stato.

Ans.5 Infiltration of the West.

Ans.6 Abbasid Dynasty

Ans.7 Annahdah al-Adabiyah

Ans.8 The discovery of new sea route to India by Vasco da Gama in 1498 CE.

Ans.9 Crosby calls it as 'biological consequences'.

Ans.10 The spread of small pox caused huge demographic losses in the New World after it first appeared in 1518 CE. This has been described by a historian as 'bacteriological warfare'.

Ans.11 Accounts of Italian traveller Marco Polo.

Ans.12 Tabriz

19.8 Suggested Readings

1. Braudel, F, Civilisation and Capitalism, 15th - 18th century, Vol. I- III, London, 1982.

2. Denis Twitchett & Frederick W. Mote (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 8, *The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644*, Cambridge, 1998.
3. Edward M. Burns, Philip L. Ralph et al, *Western Civilisations*, Vol. II, 1991.
4. Geoffrey Scammell, *The First Imperial Age: European Overseas Expansion 1400-1715*, Routledge, 1989.
5. Philip K. Hitti, *The Arabs, A Short History*, Regnery Publishing, 1996.

19.9 Terminal Questions

1. What do you understand by the term 'Modern World'?
2. Compare the agricultural developments of Europe with those of China and the Arabs.
3. Discuss the role of the emergence of strong centralized states in Europe to the creation of modern world.
4. What are the two divergent views of historians regarding the time period of beginning of modern China.
5. Give a brief account of the transformation of Arab political structure.
6. How did Europe emerge as the center of world trade? Explain.
7. Discuss the trade structure in East Asia.
8. Write a note on the trading activities of the Arabs.

UNIT-20

TRANSITION TO MODERN WORLD-II

Structure

20.1 Introduction

20.2 Objectives

20.3 Economic Modernization-Transformation in Trade, Commerce and Industry

20.3.1 Cultural Transformation-Science, Religion and Society

20.3.2 Modern Methods of Warfare

Self-Check Exercise-1

20.4 Summary

20.5 Glossary

20.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

20.7 Suggested Readings

20.8 Terminal Questions

20.1 Introduction

The late 15th and early 16th centuries marked the foundation of the modern worldview, bringing extraordinary transformations across the globe. This period witnessed the emergence of modern knowledge, skills, art, and science. Cultural advancements in non-European societies initially influenced Europe but were later shaped by European progress in science and technology. These developments fostered new social attitudes and transformed popular mindsets. Innovations in manufacturing, artillery, shipping, and military tactics established Western dominance.

20.2 Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand how international trade influenced manufacturing and commerce worldwide.

- Analyze cultural trends across societies and their role in shaping new social attitudes.
- Explore the transformation in warfare methods.

Economic Modernization: Evolution of Trade, Commerce, and Industry

- The emergence of the modern world economy in the 16th century, fueled by new trade routes and increased commercial activity, profoundly transformed Europe's economy. The influx of bullion from the Americas reshaped European society by promoting capitalism and entrepreneurial ventures. Rapid urbanization, spurred by population growth, heightened demand for industrial goods, driving structural changes in trade and production while accelerating Europe's modernization.
- During the 15th century, expanding trade altered business structures. Earlier trade practices relied on individual merchants or family partnerships like the Italian Commendas and Societa, which were short-term ventures. However, the surge in trade volume necessitated more organized management, leading to the rise of regulated companies such as the Merchant Adventurers of England. Monopolies were granted to companies like the Eastland Company, Levant Company, and Muscovy Company. Eventually, joint-stock companies emerged, offering benefits like permanent existence, increased capital from public shares, and corporate management. By the 17th century, prominent companies like the Dutch East India Company, English East India Company, Mineral and Battery Works Company, and French East India Company had become integral to European commerce.
- Globally, the growth of an exchange economy transformed market structures, replacing self-sufficient medieval systems with advanced trading networks. Permanent markets supplanted weekly fairs, while specialized traders handled retail, warehousing, and brokerage. Trading hubs became interconnected through postal services, trade news, and newspapers. Banking also evolved from family-run enterprises in Italy and Germany to public institutions in Venice, Milan, Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Nuremberg. These banks introduced new financial

practices, signaling the onset of the Commercial Revolution in the late 16th century.

- Italian merchants pioneered credit instruments such as promissory notes, letters of credit, bills of exchange, and double-entry bookkeeping, alongside insurance systems. From the 16th century onward, these practices spread across Europe, with negotiable credit instruments becoming crucial to commerce by the 17th century. Expanding trade networks increased risks during long sea voyages, prompting the rise of maritime insurance. Initially led by Italian merchants in the 15th century, this practice later extended to broader commercial activities. The need for trade and manufacturing capital led to the establishment of stock exchanges across Europe, with the Amsterdam Stock Exchange emerging as a central hub for bankers, merchants, traders, brokers, and investors, introducing modern financial transactions, as noted by Fernand Braudel.
- From the late 15th century, economic integration among agriculture, trade, and industry intensified. While traditional crafts continued to expand, new industries such as glass, copper, brass, paper, and textiles emerged. Although technological advancements were gradual, manufacturing processes significantly evolved. The Black Death and subsequent economic recession drastically reduced agricultural income, leading to the collapse of medieval craft guilds in some regions. In response, rural cottage industries emerged in England, Holland, France, and Germany, bypassing restrictive guild regulations. These industries utilized low wages and inexpensive waterpower to produce affordable goods, fostering the putting-out system and marking the proto-industrialization phase, which laid the foundation for modern industries.
- Simultaneously, Europe's expanding population and wood shortages led to increased coal mining. Technological advancements further propelled the iron industry, setting the stage for the Industrial Revolution, which profoundly reshaped European and global economies.

20.3.1 Cultural Transformation: Science, Religion, and Society

- Let's examine the cultural transformation shaped by contributions from China, the Arab world, and Europe.
- China
- China played a pivotal role in advancing science and technology to address societal needs. Innovations such as the south-pointing carriage, kites, and matches (577 CE) reached Europe only by the late 16th century. The Chinese also developed the wheelbarrow, folding umbrella, compass, printing, papermaking, and gunpowder. Their astronomical observations, including systematic records of novas and supernovas in 1006 CE, preceded similar advancements in Europe. Chinese cartographers created some of the earliest accurate maps using a grid system, surpassing contemporary European efforts.
- Despite the potential of these innovations, their societal impact in China was limited compared to Europe. For instance, while printing in Europe fueled the spread of classical humanism and the Renaissance, in China, it primarily reinforced traditional ideologies and the dominance of scholarly elites. Similarly, gunpowder revolutionized European warfare, undermining feudal fortifications and accelerating the decline of feudalism, whereas China did not leverage it for socio-political transformation.
- Historian Lynda Shaffer cautions against evaluating Chinese history solely through a European lens. She highlights that printing in China revived Confucian learning and supported government-administered examinations by making study materials affordable. Thus, the societal impact of scientific advancements varied based on each region's unique context.
- Under the Sung Dynasty, China was on the brink of industrialization, supported by a robust economy driven by trade, agriculture, and technological progress. However, this momentum stalled during the 13th and 14th centuries due to Mongol invasions and the adoption of conservative state policies.
- Arab World
- Between 900 and 1100 CE, the Arab world witnessed remarkable scientific advancement. Numerous higher-learning institutions were established, while Baghdad housed extensive manuscript collections. Arab scholars made

significant contributions to mathematics, particularly algebra. They adopted the Indian numeral system, which, after reaching Europe, became known as Arabic numerals. Al-Khwarizmi, a prominent mathematician, influenced both astronomy and commerce, areas where Arabs excelled due to their extensive trading networks.

- In medicine, Al-Razi stood out for his detailed treatises on measles and smallpox. The Arabs also made significant progress in alchemy and chemistry. According to Ameer Ali, their contributions positioned them as the "Vanguard of Civilization." European scholars acquired much of their scientific knowledge from the Arab world, primarily through Spain following its conquest by the Arabs.
- The Arabs also excelled in navigation, shipbuilding, and cartography, leveraging their central geographical position between the Far East and Europe. They invented various maritime instruments, allowing them to dominate lucrative trade routes. Arab manufacturing hubs, such as Egypt and Damascus for silk and cotton goods, Yemen and Mosul for luxury textiles, Khurasan and Armenia for carpets, and Syria for colored glass, influenced European industries, notably the famous Venetian glassmakers.
- Arab expansion facilitated cultural exchange and the assimilation of achievements from conquered regions. They inherited Hellenistic culture from the Near East, Persia, and Egypt, while trade with India and the Far East enriched their cultural landscape. However, after the 16th century, these advancements stagnated, partly due to conflicts with the West and internal instability.
- Europe
- Cultural transformation in Europe began with the Renaissance and Reformation during the 15th and 16th centuries. The Renaissance, a reaction against medieval culture, aimed to reshape societal values by emphasizing humanism—a literary movement promoting individualism, secularism, and human dignity. This movement revolutionized education, philosophy, history, and politics. For instance, political thinker Machiavelli advocated for separating politics from religion, a concept foundational to modern political systems.

- Although emerging within medieval conditions, the Renaissance fostered a new European culture. Earlier attempts to reform the Church had largely failed, but the Reformation succeeded in reshaping religious perspectives. The reformed religion promoted frugality, vocational pursuits, and acceptance of interest on productive loans, removing barriers to capitalist development and encouraging enterprise.

In terms of gender relations, medieval European society imposed significant restrictions on women. Men had the right to divorce, remarry, or even kill their wives for adultery, witchcraft, or theft—rights not afforded to women. Unmarried women often joined convents but, unlike men, could not ascend the Church hierarchy. Aristocratic women enjoyed relatively better conditions. While the Humanist movement and the Reformation promoted women's education, it was primarily to enable them to read the Bible and fulfill domestic roles. The rise of the market economy further marginalized women, as competition among artisans often excluded them from guilds.

From the late Middle Ages to the 17th century, women—particularly widows and spinsters—were frequently accused of witchcraft, as they were seen as morally weaker and thus susceptible to Satan's temptations. The spread of scientific ideas eventually ended this practice, and proto-industrialization improved women's circumstances. However, their struggle for political rights and gender equality continued into the 20th century.

Europe's greatest achievement lay in modern science. While Arabs preserved Greek natural philosophy and the Chinese invented technological tools, only Europe integrated observation, experimentation, and mathematical application into the formulation of scientific laws. This approach led to the Scientific Revolution, characterized by a mechanistic worldview free from divine intervention.

This transformation was driven not only by individual scientists but also by scientific institutions and academies that nurtured a rational and scientific spirit. Key figures included Rene Descartes and Sir Francis Bacon, who developed scientific

methodologies. The work of Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton dismantled Aristotle's worldview—which had dominated Europe for 1,300 years—and replaced it with modern scientific understanding. This rapid progress laid the foundations of the modern world, with rationality, experimentation, and scientific temper becoming hallmarks of Western society, expanding both geographical and intellectual horizons.

20.3.2 Modern Methods of Warfare

The state of technology directly influenced the economic and military landscape. Medieval warfare relied heavily on military strength and personal bravery rather than technical knowledge. Fort-like palaces built by feudal nobility provided effective defense as long as military technology remained basic. The introduction of the catapult led to the replacement of wooden structures with stone fortresses.

However, the invention of gunpowder revolutionized warfare. Though developed by the Chinese in the 9th century using saltpetre, sulfur, and crushed charcoal, it became a formidable weapon in Europe. Historians note that early 15th-century Chinese cannons were as effective as their European counterparts. Nevertheless, Europe took the lead in gunpowder development, using an improved version in the 16th century, which caused alarm in China.

By the 15th century, new weaponry, including artillery and heavy cannons, transformed European warfare. The development of corned gunpowder around 1420 CE enabled immediate combustion, enhancing battlefield effectiveness. In 1453 CE, two significant medieval conflicts were resolved through artillery use: the French expelled the English from France during the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453 CE), and the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople.

Gunpowder rendered feudal warfare obsolete, as individual nobles could not afford the high costs of artillery. This development empowered national rulers, who possessed the financial resources to maintain standing armies. The 15th century witnessed the emergence of large-bore, mobile artillery capable of following swift troop movements. Initially transported by oxen, these weapons were later drawn by powerful

horses, as seen during the Spanish campaign in Italy in 1494 CE. No town could easily withstand their assaults.

Continuous advancements followed. By the 16th century, naval artillery became essential for early colonial empires. The rising threat of privateers on the high seas led to the equipping of ships with specialized gunners. New firearms, such as arquebuses, muskets, and rifles, replaced traditional inter-state warfare, encouraging aggressive territorial expansion. European explorers and conquerors used ship-mounted cannons to dominate Central and South America and establish settlements in the West Indian islands.

The combination of advanced weaponry, mass production, sufficient capital, and Europe's scientific drive provided a significant military advantage over other regions. This armed superiority enabled European control over vast territories. According to Werner Sombart, technological advancements not only transformed warfare but also accelerated the rise of capitalism, reshaping the global economic and political landscape.

Self-Check Exercise-1

- Q.1 What is Porto-industrialization?
- Q.2 Mention two significant scientific inventions of China during the Middle Ages.
- Q.3 How did the introduction of gunpowder impact society?
- Q.4 Who is the renowned Arab mathematician?
- Q.5 Name the most prominent Arab physician.
- Q.6 Why are Arabs referred to as the "Vanguard of Civilization"?

Q.7 Identify the famous political thinker of the Renaissance who advocated for the separation of politics from religion, forming the foundation of the modern political system.

Q.8 What is the Scientific Revolution?

Q.9 Name two European scientists who significantly advanced the scientific method and promoted a rational and scientific outlook.

Q.10 When were two major conflicts of medieval Europe resolved through the use of heavy artillery?

20.4 Summary

- The 16th century marked a significant transformation worldwide, ushering in the modern era characterized by advancements in knowledge, skills, art, and science.
- The emergence of the modern global economy began in the 16th century, fueled by new trade routes and a substantial increase in trade, which ultimately propelled Europe toward modernization.
- The expansion of the commercial economy led to changes in business structures, with regulated companies like the Merchant Adventurers of England emerging during the late medieval period.
- Subsequently, joint-stock companies such as the Dutch East India Company, the English East India Company, the Mineral and Battery Works Company in England, and the French East India Company were established, enjoying several advantages.
- On an international scale, the rise of the exchange economy reshaped market structures. By the 17th century, credit instruments became crucial for commercial transactions.
- The expansion of trade networks increased the risks associated with long sea voyages, leading to the widespread adoption of insurance.
- From the late 15th century, economic activities—including agriculture, trade, and industry—began integrating effectively.

- The putting-out system gradually replaced traditional guilds, marking the proto-industrialization phase and paving the way for modern industrial development.
- China was a pioneer in science and technology, developing inventions like the wheelbarrow, folding umbrella, compass, printing, papermaking, and gunpowder to meet societal needs.
- Between 900 and 1100 CE, the Arab world experienced remarkable scientific advancements, making significant contributions to mathematics, astronomy, geography, and medicine.
- Cultural transformation in Europe began with the Renaissance and Reformation movements of the 15th and 16th centuries. However, women's social status during the medieval period was largely restricted by legal and social constraints.
- One of Europe's greatest achievements was the advancement of modern science, driven by continuous discoveries and inventions, some of which were based on Asian scientific knowledge.
- Medieval warfare primarily relied on military strength and personal bravery. However, the introduction of catapults, gunpowder, and advanced heavy cannons revolutionized military strategies in Europe.
- New weapons such as arquebuses, muskets, and rifles replaced traditional forms of warfare and encouraged European nations to adopt aggressive policies of territorial expansion.

20.5 Glossary

- **Alchemy:** An ancient practice aimed at transforming base metals into gold, which ultimately proved unsuccessful.
- **Harquebus:** An early portable firearm, typically supported by a tripod, hook, or forked rest.
- **Catapult:** A medieval war machine that used levers and ropes to launch stones or other projectiles at high speed toward a target.
- **Humanism:** A Renaissance movement characterized by renewed interest in classical art and literature, a focus on individualism, and an emphasis on secular concerns.

- **Novas and Supernovas:** Sudden brightening of stars caused by explosive gas eruptions.
- **Putting-out System:** A production method where entrepreneurs provided capital and raw materials to artisans, who completed the work at home.

20.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercise

Ans.1 Proto-industrialisation is the phase of industrialization that was not based on the factory system. Before the advent of factories, there was large-scale production for international market. However, the pace of this production was very slow. This part of industrial history is called as proto-industrialization.

Ans.2 Paper making and Gunpowder.

Ans.3 It hastened the decline of feudalism in Europe.

Ans.4 Al-Khwarizmi

Ans.5 Al-Razi

Ans.6 The contribution of Arabs in the field of science, technology and culture was no less than that of the Europeans and it is because of this reason that Ameer Ali describe them as the “Vanguard of Civilisation”.

Ans.7 Machiavelli

Ans.8 The Scientific Revolution was a series of events that marked the emergence of modern science during the early modern period, when developments in various fields of science transformed the views of society about nature.

Ans.9 Rene Descartes and Sir Francis Bacon.

Ans.10 In 1453 CE

20.7 Suggested Readings

1. Asimov, Isaac. Asimov’s Chronology of Science and Discovery. New York, 1989.
2. Bernal, J.D. Science in History, Vol. 2. London, 1969.
3. Butterfield, H.J. The Origins of Modern Science: 1300-1800. New York, 1958.
4. Cameron, Euan. The European Reformation. Oxford, 1991.
5. Chadwick, O. The Reformation. Baltimore, 1976.

6. Cipola, C.M. *Guns, Sails, and Empires: Technological Innovation and the Early Stages of European Expansion, 1400-1700*. New York, 1965.
7. Hall, A.R. *The Scientific Revolution: 1500-1800*. London, 1962.
8. Spangenburg, Ray and Moser, Diane K. *The History of Science: From the Ancient Greeks to the Scientific Revolution*. Hyderabad, 1999.
9. McNeill, William H. *The Age of Gunpowder Empires, 1450-1800 (Essays on Global and Comparative History)*. American Historical Association, 1990.

20.8 Terminal Questions

1. Explain the process of economic modernization that led to the rise of the modern world.
2. Assess the scientific advancements made by China and the Arabs. Why did these advancements fail to bring about societal transformation?
3. Highlight the key aspects of the cultural transformation that transitioned Europe from the medieval period to the modern age.
4. How did advancements in warfare benefit European nations?