

UNIT FOUR

THE MIDDLE AGES AND EARLY MODERN WORLD, C. 500 AD-1789

The Middle Ages (c. 500 A.D. to 1500 A.D.)

1. The Fall of the Western Roman Empire:

- The Western Roman Empire declined due to internal problems, the separation from the wealthier Eastern part in 395 A.D., and invasions by Germanic tribes.
- Germanic tribes, initially from Scandinavia, began invading Roman territories in the 5th century A.D. The Visigoths, Franks, Ostrogoths, and other tribes contributed to the empire's collapse, culminating in Rome's fall in 476 A.D.
- The invasions led to the fragmentation of the Roman Empire into several Germanic kingdoms, a decline in trade, and a shift from urban to rural life. The Roman legacy persisted through Latin language, literature, and law.

2. The Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire:

- In 330 A.D., Emperor Constantine the Great moved the capital from Rome to Byzantium, renaming it Constantinople. The Eastern Roman Empire, known as the Byzantine Empire, survived for another thousand years.
- The Byzantine Empire was richer and better defended than the West. Under Emperor Justinian I (527-565 A.D.), it reached its greatest size and established the Justinian Code, a key legal framework.
- The Byzantine Empire preserved Greek and Roman culture and was a bridge between ancient and modern Europe. It also faced challenges from Persian invasions and the rise of Islam.
- The empire began to decline in the 11th century, culminating in the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

3. Western Europe During the Middle Ages:

- After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Western Europe experienced a period of decline and division. This era, once called the "Dark Ages," saw the rise of feudalism and a rural, isolated society.
- Feudalism involved a hierarchy where local lords (vassals) controlled lands granted by higher lords and provided military service. The manor, the lord's estate, was self-sufficient, and peasants or serfs worked the land and paid dues.
- The period saw the establishment of small kingdoms by Germanic tribes, such as the Franks, Visigoths, and Ostrogoths. Charlemagne (768-814 A.D.)

briefly reunited much of Western Europe and promoted learning and Christianity.

- The decline of feudalism began with the revival of trade and towns in the 11th century, leading to the rise of a middle class and the development of guilds.

The Early Modern World (c. 1500 A.D. to 1789 A.D.)

Key Concepts:

- **Manor:** A lord's estate, central to the medieval economy, where peasants or serfs worked.
- **Vassal:** A lesser lord who received land from a higher lord in exchange for loyalty and service.
- **Renaissance:** A cultural movement that began in the 14th century, marking a period of revival in art, literature, and learning.
- **Caliphate:** An Islamic state led by a caliph, who is considered a religious and political successor to Muhammad.
- **Justinian Code:** A collection of Roman laws compiled under Emperor Justinian I, influencing many legal systems.
- **Lutheranism:** A major branch of Protestant Christianity that originated with Martin Luther's reforms in the 16th century.

4. Main Features of the Middle Ages:

- **Feudalism:** A system where local lords controlled lands and provided protection in exchange for service from vassals. This system dominated medieval Europe's rural economy.
- **Manorial System:** The manor was the economic center, with peasants working the land and paying dues to the lord. Serfs, who were bound to the land, made up the majority of the population.
- **Social Structure:** The society was divided into a privileged upper class (kings, nobles, clergy) and an unprivileged lower class (peasants, serfs). Social mobility was limited, and vassalage was hereditary.
- **Role of the Church:** The Christian church was a powerful institution, influencing government and education. It played a central role in medieval life, including the development of universities and the promotion of Romanesque and Gothic architecture.

5. Revival of Trade and Towns:

- Trade began to revive in the 11th century, leading to the growth of towns and a new middle class. The guild system regulated trades and crafts.
- **Medieval Culture:** Art and learning flourished, with the construction of cathedrals and the rise of universities. Gothic architecture and the development of universities marked significant achievements of the period.

6. The Crusades (1096-1270):

- The Crusades were military expeditions organized by Western European Christians to reclaim the Holy Land from Muslim control. Initiated by Pope Urban II, the Crusades had both religious and material motivations.

The Impacts of the Crusades

Economic and Trade Developments: Although the Crusaders ultimately failed to maintain control over Jerusalem, the Crusades had several significant impacts on European life:

1. **Increased Trade:** The Crusades enhanced trade between Europe and the Mediterranean. Cities along the Mediterranean coast, such as Venice, expanded their maritime trade networks. Venetian and other Italian merchants used their fleets, initially built to transport Crusaders, to trade goods like sugar, cotton, and rice with the Middle East.
2. **Advancements in Shipbuilding:** The increased maritime activity led to improvements in shipbuilding. West Europeans learned how to construct better ships, which further facilitated trade.
3. **Money Economy:** The Crusades helped shift Europe from a barter economy to a money economy. Nobles and knights started to collect taxes in cash rather than grain. This change encouraged peasants to sell goods in towns to earn money for taxes, weakening the feudal system and serfdom.

Social and Political Changes:

1. **Rise of Monarchs and the Papacy:** The Crusades increased the power and prestige of European monarchs and the Pope. Monarchs gained revenues through taxes to fund Crusades, while the Pope's influence grew as a result of his leadership in organizing the Crusades.
2. **Advancements in Navigation:** Crusaders' experiences led to more accurate maps and the use of magnetic compasses, which improved navigation and exploration.

3. **Cultural Exchange and Curiosity:** The Crusades heightened European curiosity about the East. Marco Polo's travels to China and his subsequent writings about Chinese civilization sparked European interest in distant lands.

Legacy of the Crusades:

1. **Revival of European Contacts:** The Crusades, along with travels like those of Marco Polo, contributed to the revival of European contact with the wider world, fostering early capitalist relations.
2. **Expansion of Knowledge and Trade:** The increased interactions between Europe and the Middle East laid the groundwork for future explorations and trade, significantly influencing European economic and cultural development.

In summary, while the Crusades did not achieve their primary goal of maintaining control over Jerusalem, they significantly impacted European trade, navigation, and social structures, contributing to the broader scope of European exploration and economic transformation.

The Dynastic Cycle in China

The Dynastic Cycle is a historical concept explaining the rise and fall of Chinese dynasties based on the "Mandate of Heaven." This belief held that the heavens granted a dynasty the right to rule, and their legitimacy depended on their ability to govern well. Here's a clear outline of the concept and key historical examples:

Concept of the Dynastic Cycle

1. **Mandate of Heaven:** According to Chinese belief, heaven granted a dynasty the right to rule. If a dynasty governed effectively and upheld moral values, it retained the Mandate of Heaven.
2. **Rise of a Dynasty:** A new dynasty typically emerged after a period of disunity or rebellion. The founder would unify China, restore order, and receive the Mandate of Heaven.
3. **Prosperity:** The dynasty would achieve political stability, economic prosperity, and cultural flourishing.
4. **Decline:** Over time, corruption, inefficiency, and natural disasters would signal the loss of the Mandate of Heaven. The dynasty's decline often led to peasant uprisings, rebellions, or invasions.
5. **Fall and Replacement:** The weakened dynasty would eventually be overthrown. A new dynasty would rise, claiming the Mandate of Heaven, and the cycle would begin anew.

Historical Examples

1. **Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D.):** After nearly 400 years of disunity, the Sui dynasty unified China. It rebuilt the Grand Canal, which facilitated trade and military logistics between north and south China. However, corruption and rebellion led to its downfall.
2. **Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.):** The Tang Dynasty is noted for its cultural and economic achievements. It restored the Han administrative system and extended the civil service exams. Despite its prosperity, internal strife, rebellion, and corruption led to its decline.
3. **Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.):** The Song Dynasty was a period of significant advancements in technology and culture, including the invention of gunpowder and movable type printing. However, it faced constant threats from nomadic invaders and eventually fell to the Mongols.
4. **Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368 A.D.):** Founded by Kublai Khan, the Yuan Dynasty expanded trade and welcomed foreign travelers like Marco Polo. It struggled with corruption and peasant uprisings, leading to its collapse.
5. **Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.):** The Ming Dynasty restored stability and prosperity to China. It reintroduced Confucian principles and conducted naval expeditions. The Ming dynasty eventually weakened due to internal strife and external pressures.
6. **Qing Dynasty (1644-1912 A.D.):** Established by the Manchu, the Qing Dynasty managed to unify China and implement reforms. However, it faced growing challenges from Western powers and internal dissent, leading to its eventual collapse and the end of imperial China.

The Dynastic Cycle illustrates how the concept of the Mandate of Heaven shaped Chinese history, with each dynasty rising, flourishing, declining, and being replaced in a continuous cycle until the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1912.

The Renaissance

Overview: The Renaissance, meaning "rebirth," was a transformative period of intellectual and artistic creativity that began in Italy in the 14th century and spread across Europe. It marked a revival of classical Greek and Roman culture and is considered one of the pivotal moments in Western civilization.

Reasons for the Renaissance in Italy:

1. **Strategic Location:** Italy's position on the Mediterranean facilitated trade and cultural exchange with Asia and Europe. Italian city-states like Genoa, Pisa, and Venice became important centers of trade, banking, and industry.

2. **Classical Heritage:** Italy was the heart of ancient Roman civilization, and the rediscovery of classical art and literature inspired Renaissance thinkers. This connection to the classical past fueled a new appreciation for human reason and individualism.

Key Features of the Renaissance:

1. Humanism:

- Humanism emphasized the dignity and worth of the individual. Scholars and artists focused on the potential of human achievement, inspired by the classical texts of Greece and Rome.
- Humanists believed in using reason and observation to understand the world, which led to a shift away from solely religious explanations.

2. Art and Architecture:

- **Artistic Innovations:** Renaissance artists sought to create more realistic and three-dimensional representations. Figures were depicted with depth, shadows, and lifelike details.
 - **Giotto** (1267-1337) began this transformation with his realistic depiction of space and emotion.
 - **Masaccio** (1401-1428) introduced further realistic effects such as shadows.
- **High Renaissance Artists:**
 - **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452-1519) mastered techniques like shading and blurring to create lifelike portraits such as the Mona Lisa and The Last Supper. His scientific studies also contributed to his artistic skill.
 - **Michelangelo** (1475-1564) created masterpieces like the sculpture of David and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, showcasing his skill in depicting the human form.
- **Architecture:** Renaissance architects revived classical styles with columns and arches. **Filippo Brunelleschi** designed the dome of Florence's cathedral, a feat of engineering that demonstrated Renaissance ingenuity.

3. Literature and Learning:

- Renaissance humanists like **Petrarch** collected and studied ancient texts, promoting new methods of criticism and learning.
- Writers began using vernacular languages, making literature accessible to a broader audience. Notable figures include **William Shakespeare** and **Miguel de Cervantes**.
- The invention of the printing press by **Johann Gutenberg** in 1450 revolutionized the spread of knowledge by enabling the mass production of books.

4. Scientific Advancements:

- The Scientific Revolution, part of the Renaissance, saw major advancements in scientific understanding. **Nicholas Copernicus** proposed the heliocentric theory, challenging the geocentric view of the universe. **Galileo Galilei** provided evidence supporting this theory, and **Isaac Newton** formulated the law of universal gravitation.
- Innovations such as the microscope and improvements in measurement tools enhanced scientific research.

5. **Political and Economic Impact:**

- The Renaissance led to a new view of political power, influenced by thinkers like **Niccolò Machiavelli**, who argued that rulers should prioritize power over moral considerations.
- Economic growth in Italy and the broader European context was driven by increased trade, the accumulation of wealth, and a focus on material improvement.

Conclusion: The Renaissance was a period of profound change that reshaped art, science, literature, and politics. Its emphasis on human potential and classical knowledge laid the groundwork for modern Western civilization.