HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE GOVERNMENT IN HISTORY – Postclassical Period

Contents

Overview

Forms This period featured the development of formal states in additional regions – for example, Japan and northwestern Europe. Partly because of this expansion, partly because of the collapse of some of the great classical empires – and particularly Western Rome – the emphasis on centralized, imperial states on the whole declined in this period. Strong state traditions were revived in China, under the Sui and then Tang dynasties. The Byzantine Empire, heir to Rome in parts of the Balkans and present-day Turkey, also had a strong imperial structure with a substantial bureaucracy. The Arab Caliphate, in contrast though covering a vast territory in the Middle East, North Africa and Spain, was more loosely organized, with considerable local autonomy. Lack of centralization predominated even more clearly in other regions. Both Europe and Japan, though aware of strong state traditions from Rome or China, developed separate, warring states constrained to some extent through feudal ties of loyalty to regional lords. Russia established a monarchy, but again with relatively limited central powers. Large kingdoms arose in West Africa – notably, Ghana and then Mali – but they involved careful negotiation with local aristocracies. The rise or spread of major religions was an important political factor. In Western Europe, as the Roman Empire declined, the Catholic church developed a substantial institutional structure officially separate from the ensuing feudal states. Here and elsewhere, religion might compete with political leaders for loyalty, and also commanded substantial revenues – limiting opportunities for state taxation. In the Byzantine Empire and then Russia, the state exercised more control over the Orthodox Church. Similarly Islam, seeking pious rulers who would defend the faith, could support the state – though many rulers in the Arab Caliphate paid little attention to religious issues. Chinese authorities came to view Buddhism with great concern, because it was not focused on political loyalty despite some adjustments to Chinese culture, and ultimately the Tang dynasty reduced state tolerance for Buddhism. In feudal Japan, however, Buddhism provided a more effective separate belief system.

Functions This period saw relatively few innovations in government functions. Indeed, more decentralized systems, such as Japanese or European feudalism, reduced central controls of military and infrastructure activities. Local lords, or individual cities, often had to undertake road building. Each major lord sponsored his own military force. The overarching question, in this period, involved the government's religious role. The Chinese government, reviving its concern for enforcing a suitable political culture, ultimately directly attacked Buddhism, closing many monasteries, though without eliminating the religion entirely. While the Catholic Church remained technically separate from the state in Western Europe, with its own body of law, Catholic leaders frequently, and usually successfully, called on the state to help persecute heretics or enforce religious laws in other respects; in the Crusades, first called by the pope at the end of the 11th century, the Church even asked political leaders to undertake the conquest of Jerusalem. Islamic belief that the state, and its rulers, should defend and enforce the faith was quite clear. Most Islamic governments were, however, fairly tolerant of other religions, often simply requiring a higher tax payment in return for peaceful coexistence; and Islamic law and courts developed somewhat independently of formal states.

China and the Postclassical Period

The postclassical period After the fall of the great empires, Han, Rome, Gupta, formation of massive empires became less common for several centuries. Partly this reflects the arrival of newer regions onto the civilization map, where there was simply neither sufficient experience nor resources to build the most ambitious political structures (sometimes, despite certain efforts). Partly it reflected the chaos that followed imperial collapse, where it proved difficult to pick up the pieces – an obvious factor in Western Europe and to an extent India. A final element, however, involved the rise and spread of missionary religions – Buddhism, Christianity and Islam – that might take attention and leadership away from the secular realm and divert resources as well. How governments interacted with religion, particularly religions they could not fully control, became a more important factor in the patterns of government more generally than had been the case in the classical period. In many societies, for example, education became even more decisively a religious preserve, and while this could still generate suitable government officials there was potential competition for attention.

Postclassical China: overview China was in most respects a political outlier, re-forming a powerful empire and refining its institutions still further. After several centuries of disruption, core features of the Han dynasty were restored (though under new dynasties) and then elaborated. The challenge of religion was, ultimately, addressed head-on, with renewed Confucianism the clear beneficiary. China also benefited from rising trade (carried mostly by Arab and other merchants) and manufacturing, generating new wealth, larger cities, and more substantial tax resources. China in the period featured two major dynasties, the Tang and Song, followed by a brief and (to many Chinese) unpleasant interlude of Mongol control.

Religion Christianity and Islam were not major factors in postclassical China. Islamic armies were turned back on the western frontier, and a handful of Arab merchants in southern coastal cities were tolerated without great difficulty. Only a trickle of Christians, mainly Nestorians, sought entry. Strong governments, particularly under the Tang, set up border check points in the west along the Silk Roads, making unwanted entry more difficult for people without appropriate documentation. Buddhism was another matter. It spread widely from the late classical period onward, aided by trade contacts with India and by deteriorating conditions after the fall of the Han. Many Chinese were converted, and restored dynasties, notably the Tang, for a time welcomed the religion, seeing it as a source of cultural support. Chinese Buddhists largely responded by emphasizing their loyalty to the state and family values, modifying traditional Buddhist precedent in the process. But Confucianists were suspicious of Buddhism as unduly spiritual and apolitical, a distraction from secular and family goals, and a considerable diversion of resources. The Tang dynasty about-faced, and began to persecute Buddhists, seizing many monasteries. They did not eliminate a Buddhist minority but they eliminated its political potential. This was a truly interesting response, a clear precedent, reflecting but also promoting the primacy of government in cultural and religious affairs.

Bureaucratic innovations: Tang Tang rulers commanded the scene from 618 ti 907 CE. In foreign policy, they combined additional territorial conquests with diplomatic missions, seeking and obtaining tribute from various neighboring governments, while also offering gifts and marriage alliances (an old policy). The government sent emissaries as far away as India and the Middle East. The regime carefully regained control over the inception point of the Silk Roads, eagerly fostering trade. Early on the dynasty introduced an elaborate law code, though building on prior precedent, that stipulated a variety of crimes and a graded series of punishment from caning with bamboo to death (the severity of punishments varying with the status of the victim). The code long survived in China and was imitated in neighboring territories like Vietnam and Japan. The Tang reestablished roving regional sheriffs, who began to introduce new forensic methods into the detection of crime. Regions were divided into prefectures, with local magistrates under the prefect; military districts were divided similarly. Roving commissioners were sent around to keep an eye on the regional officials. Administratively, the Tang set up several key ministries, over areas like the military, justice, recordkeeping, finance and public works – another arrangement that lasted for centuries. This was a far more centralized system than the Han had established, with no semi-autonomous regional rulers. One department, headed by the Censor-in-Chief, sought to keep an eye on the behavior of the other top officials and ministries. Massive record keeping

reflected the need for a systematic approach to taxation, and also served to help regulate property claims. The Tang also undertook a systematic census The bureaucratic examination system was revived and restored, emphasizing tests based on the Confucian classics with essays required on governance and even poetry. But appearance and behavior were evaluated as well, which gave a particular advantage to upper-class candidates. But the tests were in principle open to almost all males, and some mobility did occur. The Tang expanded the state-run secondary school system, topped by a National University, to offer relevant training (again however, only to a minority). The Tang also promoted equality of inheritance, as a means of cutting down the independent power of landowners by preventing the undue expansion of estates. Overall, the Tang represented an active imperial government, bolstered by a number of administrative innovations and the characteristic large bureaucracy – large at least by the standards of the time. While a number of powerful rulers represented the dynasty at points, the system could run without a strong emperor.

The Song Ruling from 960 to 1279 (though in the later part of the period, overseeing a truncated empire), the Song largely maintained Tang policies though with less interference in economic activities, more reliance on private initiative. Principal innovations involved new welfare efforts and the further development of the examination system. The government sponsored some retirement homes, public clinics and paupers' graveyards. The postal system was beefed up to encourage efficient communication throughout the empire. The merit-based examination system gained greater attention, and really began to open the bureaucracy to talent from various social levels – though sons of aristocrats had continued advantages, prompting resentments among other educated groups. Early in the dynasty about 30,000 students stood for exams annually, but by the end of the dynasty the number had soared to 400,000. The central bureaucracy itself employed about 20,000 people, but there were also jobs in local administration and other areas – including tutoring. Funding for the training system expanded considerably.

Mongols and after Mongols overturned the Song in the late 13th century, reestablishing unity in the Chinese empire. Mongols continued to use existing Confucian bureaucrats, but they were widely resented as barbarian upstarts. And procedures like the examination system were dropped for a time. After the defeat of the Mongols however, the Ming dynasty restored most of the political precedents that had been established by the Tang and Song. The Mongol period, vital in other aspects of world history, adds little to the history of government because of its short span, though it would strongly affect foreign policy for countries like China and Russia during the subsequent period.

Study questions

1. What were the most distinctive features of Chinese government under the Tang and Song?
2. Why did bureaucratic service carry such great prestige?
3. Why would the Mongols not seek to undo the basic administrative system?

Further reading

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Japan

Overview: Japan in the postclassical period constituted one of several cases in which an effort to build a more ambitious government structure ultimately failed – because of internal resistance and arguably a lack of sufficient prior political experience. Japan began sending missions to China in the 6th century. Over time, the result brought Japan a writing system (adapted to a very different spoken language); Buddhism and a variety of artistic forms; some influence from Confucianism; and a variety of more advanced technologies. Not surprisingly, a deep interest in the Chinese state seemed to offer another

compelling opportunity, but imitation foundered after several decades, leaving Japan with a decentralized feudal system and a distinctive political legacy of its own.

Government origins Agriculture and iron technology were introduced rather suddenly to Japan via migrations from the Asian mainland. An early result was the formation of many, possibly hundreds, of regional kingdoms. Warfare and negotiation gradually created a more unified state, in the centuries after 250 CE, and a hereditary line of emperors (who still exist today as the world's oldest dynasty).

Chinese influence Growing contact with China brought efforts to establish Confucian values for officials and even an attempt at a merit-based bureaucracy, in the 7th century. Further reforms after 645 aimed at further centralization. The government claimed ownership of all land, to be distributed equally to farmers, and compiled a registry of households to serve as the basis for taxation. The government began to construct a grandiose capital (now the city of Nara), while also promoting Buddhism in response to a series of natural disasters.

Decentralization From 794 onward the power of the central state declined steadily – though it sponsored a number of cultural achievements in art and literature. Internal power struggles and the increasing isolation of the emperor led to neglect of administration. A variety of nobles and Buddhist orders seized land, reducing available tax revenues and support for the military. Landowners, again including many Buddhist factions, began to set up military forces of their own, recruiting the famous *samurai* soldiers and effectively establishing a decentralized, and often fractious, feudal system. Internal warfare became common.

Kamakura shogunate and after Military success brought one clan to power after 1185. The emperor, now largely a figurehead though invested with religious symbolism, named one leader a *Shogun,* exercising some central power despite the continued existence of various local armies. The system, which would be reproduced more successfully around 1600, bore some resemblance to feudal monarchies in Western Europe, in that there was some central authority but without extensive government functions. Feudal lords came together twice in the late 13th century to defeat a threatened Mongol invasion, but the effort depleted the shogun's financial base and actually led to further decentralization. Shogunates continued in name from the 14th century onward, but any central power depended on negotiations with powerful regional lords, called *daimyos*, who frequently disobeyed central directives. Civil wars were frequent, and by 1477 hundreds of regional feudal states dotted the islands. A number of rival Buddhist temples also set up their own armies, effectively forming part of the feudal system. This was the political pattern in place when the Portuguese first arrived in Japan (by a seafaring misadventure) in the middle of the 16th century,

Legacies This checkered political experience did not prevent periods of considerable economic and demographic growth and cultural creativity, though the worst civil wars clearly took a toll. The continued existence of the emperor and the precedent of shogunate rule were features that would later be revived and reworked to generate more effective government, though the feudal system survived in principle until 1868. Japanese feudalism resembled its entirely separate though coterminous Western counterpart in many ways, a clear response to the absence of effective central control combined with a strong landed aristocracy and an equally strong military ethic. Peasant-serfs depended heavily on the protection the daimyos could offer, in return for labor service and taxation in kind. Japanese feudalism was however somewhat different from its Western analogue. Samurai solders were more fully dependent on the regional lords than were Western vassals on their aristocratic superiors; they had less control over their own land and resources. This may account for the fact that Japanese feudalism did not generate a tradition of consultations between lords and vassals that, in the West, would ultimately produce the first version of a parliamentary system. Japanese feudalism, in contrast, more fiercely emphasized group loyalty, the unwavering devotion of samurai that could, among other things, lead to ritual suicides when a lord was defeated in battle. Many historians believe that this tradition of group loyalty would later contribute to the organizational culture of industrial Japan, in contrast to the more individualistic business operations in the West.

Study questions

1. Why were Japanese leaders drawn to the idea of a strong central state, but why were they unable to follow through?
2. What was the relationship between shogun and emperor?
3. What were the chief legacies and results of the Japanese feudal system?

Further reading

Conrad Schirokauer, *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations* (Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013)

Jeffrey Mass, *The Origins of Japan's Medieval World* (Stanford University Press, 1997)

India/South Asia

Overview The political history of India during the postclassical period is dotted with the rise and fall of a variety of regional empires, in various parts of the subcontinent—but not a great deal of fundamental innovation in government. Many of the regional surges were short-lived. Considerable localism persisted, with republics and small monarchies. Religion remained an important political variable. The majority of regional rulers were Hindu, but some were attracted to Jainism; and there were disputes among various approaches to Hinduism. Many rulers were fairly tolerant, but it was not uncommon, when a regional state expanded through warfare, to see attacks on rival religious groups and destruction of religious sites. On the more positive side, many regimes sponsored important cultural initiatives, including temple building but also support for religiously-based education. Beyond this complex and varied pattern, two developments warrant particular attention.

Delhi sultanate The Delhi Sultanate formed as a result of invasions by an Islamic Turkic group, and lasted from 1206 to 1526. At its height, this empire covered most of the subcontinent, though it declined as a result of counterattacks by Hindu kingdoms plus the formation of some smaller Islamic states. The sultanate is credited with integrating India more fully into larger patterns of trade and cultural exchange. From a governance standpoint, two features were particularly noteworthy. (It is also worth mentioning that a woman briefly held power, one of the rare instances in traditional Islamic governments.) The rulers imported more Persian government principles, organizing more centralized administration aimed particularly at raising resources for military support. This included, ultimately, levying a special tax on nonMuslims. Economic intervention increased, again compared to more typical Hindu states, with heightened penalties for businessmen who disobeyed regulations – including price controls in the public markets. Various goods were banned as unnecessary luxuries, save through special license, and a network of informers was employed for enforcement. Agricultural taxes soared as well. Sultans frequently saw themselves as religious representatives, called upon to suppress Hindu activities (and also, later, to resist Mongol invasions, which the regime managed successfully). Prohibitions on anthropomorphic representations in art were enforced. At times, there is no question that the government attacked and destroyed a number of Hindu temples and Buddhist shrines – in some cases building mosques using the same sites and construction materials. (There is no question as well that the regime contributed greatly to the essential eclipse of Buddhism and Buddhist educational institutions on the subcontinent.) However the overall religious policy was not consistent; Hindus were frequently recruited into the bureaucracy, and at times the regime subsidized Hindu religious activities. A common pattern involved temple destruction as part of regional conquest, followed by subsidized reconstruction when stability was restored. On a smaller scale, the Delhi Sultanate promoted increased Muslim presence in India but also some fusion with the family patterns of upper-caste Indians. Needless to say, the religious policies of the Sultanate remain a vigorous bone of contention among Indian historian and politicians at a time of renewed Hindu-Muslim tension in India.

Regimes in the south At various points during the postclassical period, larger regional governments emerged in the south, in partial contrast to earlier patterns where smaller units predominated except when an empire successfully expanded from the north. The establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire was particularly noteworthy, on the heels of the expansion and then retreat of the Delhi sultanate and in the effort to restore Hindu rule. The large regional empire took shape in the mid-14th century and retained vitality for about two centuries, before a period of decline. This was a tolerant regime, protecting Hinduism but adopting Islamic procedures in the royal court. A substantial Muslim minority flourished. As the

Vijayanagara declined, a number of effective though smaller monarchies sprang up the south. Overall, improvements in government in the region furthered commercial growth and cultural innovation.

Study questions

1. Why do the policies of the Delhi sultanate lend themselves to contemporary dispute?
2. Why and how did Hinduism and Hindu political regimes hold on so well despite Islamic invasion?
3. Was the postclassical period, on balance, not one of major political innovation, compared to developments in other regions of Asia?

Further reading

Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: a political and military history* (Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Richard Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age* (Penguin Books, 2019)

Chandra Salish, *History of Medieval India, 800-1700* (Orient Longman, 2007)

Government in the Middle East/North Africa: the Caliphate

Overview: During most of the postclassical period the dominant government in this region was the Caliphate, which at its height ruled an empire from present-day Pakistan in the east to Morocco and Spain in the west. The Caliphate went through three main phases: its early period centered on the need to identify succession to the Prophet Muhammed, who left no male heirs; the Umayyad dynasty (661-750 CE), based in Damascus, which loosely guided the process of Arab conquest; and the Abbasid dynasty, which began in 750 and was effectively demolished with the Mongol invasion of Baghdad in 1258 (though rulers fled to Cairo and continued to claim religious authority). Abbasid emphasis rested on internal consolidation and efforts to suppress a variety of internal challenges; but it was under the Abbasids that Arab Islam enjoyed the greatest mercantile prosperity and cultural creativity.

Key issues Arab Islamic government was not particularly original in terms of administrative structure. It also faced recurrent problems of succession, with bitter quarrels and sometimes outright bloodshed among siblings competing for power. This aside, the most important features of this government were: 1. The familiar one of seeking to maintain such a large territory, and under the Abbasids the gradual loss of ground to breakaway regions (particularly in North Africa and Spain); 2. The complex issue of the role of Islam in the state; and 3. The establishment of distinctive economic and particularly social policies, extending the state's welfare function.

Formation The term caliph most commonly meant "successor to the prophet of God", but the minority Shia group insisted that the caliph should be appointed by God from the descendants of the Prophet. Early caliphs were elected by a council of tribal leaders, which some hold to be an early form of Arab democracy. But this system ended with the triumph of the Umayyad dynasty, which introduced the principle of heredity. It was this transition that prompted the Shia revolt, in favor of Muhammad's son-in-law. Subsequent Arab conquests made the Umayyad caliphate the largest empire the world had seen to that point (5.17 million square miles at its height), and the sixth largest in human history. But the Umayyads were ultimately unseated by rebellions by a variety of groups, including Shiites but also non-Arab Muslims, leading to Abbasid triumph and relocation of the capital to Baghdad).

Administrative system Ummayad rule was very loosely organized (even more than Roman rule had been), with great latitude for local systems and administrative structures including tolerance for the sizable religious minorities of Christians and Jews. Abbasids, with greater Persian involvement, tightened up somewhat. Typically a grand vizier was appointed to oversee administration, with regional emirs taking charge under his direction; 24 provinces were established. Over time, Viziers often wielded greater power than the Caliphs, many of whom devoted themselves to a life of indulgence and the often intricate patterns of court intrigue (including the special role of eunuchs, castrated men initially hired to guard the wives and concubines of the ruler but who could gain wider powers within the court apparatus). No clear system of administrative recruitment or training was established. While education expanded rapidly, it was under mosque control for the most part. Under the Abbasids particularly, many non-Arabs and even non-Muslims gained a role in the bureaucracy. Local and regional governments maintained prior traditions by

building and maintaining roads and operating an extensive postal system – the post office in Baghdad even had a map showing distances between major cities (though mailmen served as spies as well). Considerable latitude continued to extend to local governments, though gradually the role of Arabic in record-keeping gained ascendancy. Throughout the Arab caliphates, recruitment of a reliable military force was an essential feature of the state, sometimes including the use of slaves as soldiers.

The role of Islam Unlike Christianity, Islam was born in close association to the state: Muhammad was primarily a prophet and religious leader, but he sought and gained firm control of local government, and this linkage was passed on to the Caliphate. There was no question that, in Islamic political theory, the primary role of the state was promotion and protection of the faith and enforcement of Islamic law. The *Qur'an* made few references to the Arab term for caliph, but it clearly suggested that the office was established by God. Other passages emphasized the importance of religious rule: "So govern the people by that which God has revealed (Islam), and follow not their vain desires, beware of them in case they seduce you from just some part of that which God has revealed to you." Many later Arab theorists continued to emphasize the religious functions of the ruler, along with more general obligations of personal piety, provision of justice, and concern for public welfare. They also frequently insisted on the importance of having a single leader for Islam. The same line of thinking stressed the role of the state in enforcing the Sharia, or Islamic law, and even the necessity to rise up against a ruler who was not fulfilling his religious functions. However, this approach was complicated by several factors, in theory and in practice. Interpretations of Sharia law could vary. Many rulers, as noted, were not personally pious nor primarily interested in religious enforcement, but this did not necessarily prompt revolt. The Prophet himself had said that Muslims could live under a nonMuslim state (even concealing their religious identity if necessary), for after all religious, not political goals were primary for a faithful Muslim. A related tension surrounded the concept of *jihad,* or struggle. For many early Muslims, particularly through the Umayyad period, this could mean active military efforts against unbelievers (though the Prophet had also warned against efforts to convert by force). More commonly, it came to mean defense against attacks on Islam or, even more widely, a personal struggle to maintain a virtuous life – in this latter case, not intimately connected to government at all. From the 8th century onward most political theorists emphasized the more harmonious aspects of Islam over the confrontational. Overall, the Islamic approach to the state was and remains complex, not totally unlike tensions which arose under Christianity despite a different initial base.

Economic and welfare functions Effective caliphs quickly realized that economic prosperity was vital, if only to provide adequate tax revenues. They frequently claimed basic land ownership, with private property a delegation from the state and therefore subject to taxation and regulation alike. The real estate tax was central to government finances, though other levies, including taxes on the sale of cattle, were involved as well. Resistance to taxation did occur, but was put down by military force. The collective approach did not prevent the rise of a market economy, but it could lead to interventions, for example to deal with periods of scarcity or to handle limited resources. The government established a central monetary system, replacing a welter of local currencies. Islamic emphasis on charity had clear implications for government. Tax revenues were used in part for state-sponsored support for the poor including widows, the elderly, orphans and the disabled. This was an unprecedented extension of state functions, and an important innovation.

Cultural role For the most part, the flowering of science and literature, as well as religion was independent of the state, though the government did encourage missions to place like India to seek out useful knowledge and technology. Nevertheless, some Abbasid rulers tried actively to support rational inquiry, even punishing scholars who tried to insist on faith alone. However, this government stance declined after the 9th and 10th centuries. Some historians have argued that state intervention in intellectual life, and then the turn away from cultural diversity, played a role in the larger decline of cultural creativity toward the end of the Arab caliphate.

Loose ends Regional rebellions against the Abbasids led to the formation of more localized caliphates, some even before the Mongol invasions, claiming many of the same governmental principles though without the ability to point to overall Islamic leadership. Ultimately the principal claim to the caliphate passed, in the 16th century, to the Ottoman regime, but much later, in 1924 and after the Ottoman collapse and the rise of the secular Turkish republic, the office was abolished altogether. Some have

speculated that this left the door open to renewed and sometimes dangerous claims to the mantle of caliph.

Study questions

1. What were the main complexities in the Islamic approach to government during the postclassical period?
2. Why and how did the role of jihad change during the course of the postclassical caliphates?
3. What were the main functions of government during the period of the Arab caliphates?

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Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the 8th to the 11th centuries* (Routledge, 2004)

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Eastern Europe in the Postclassical Period

The issue of Christianity Government in both eastern and western Europe in the postclassical period was strongly affected by the rise of Christianity. But the political implications of Christianity are not easily summarized, with challenges somewhat different from those involved with Islam. Christianity was launched separately from the Roman state and was recurrently persecuted by the state, from the crucifixion of Christ onward. Deeply pacifist originally, Christians normally refused to serve in the Roman army. Gradually the church began to build a structure separate from the state. However, in 313 the Emperor Constantine famously accepted Christianity and began to treat it effectively as a state religion, among other things interfering directly in doctrinal controversies. Christians for the most part welcomed the shift, now free from persecution and benefiting from state sponsorship – adherence grew rapidly. Military service was now accepted (a change the Emperor insisted upon). From this point onward Christian leaders might welcome state support, including effort to repress religious dissent, and, in turn, actively defended the state essentially as readily as did Muslims. But the notion of separate goals, and a separate set of precedents, persisted as well, occasionally intruding on affairs of state and even provoking occasional resistance (though Christian leaders, like their Muslim counterparts, normally urged obedience unless the state was egregiously flouting religion).

Orthodox Christianity These complexities were less marked in Eastern Europe than in the West. Eastern Orthodoxy resisted the sway of the Roman papacy – the institution most clearly capable of standing separate from the state – and in the schism of 1054 renounced papal authority altogether- - one of the main causes of the rift. Orthodox church structure remained somewhat apart from the state, but the gap was narrow. In the Byzantine Empire, the most powerful government unit in the region through the postclassical period, the government appointed top church officials, essentially operating as a theocracy. Imperial law stipulated that subjects must be Christian, with others regarded as "mad and foolish persons" and heretics (though in fact there were many of them, including a Jewish minority, throughout the imperial period). Christianity was one of the key cultural props to the Empire, and the government saw protection and financing of religion as a basic function. In the 8th and 9th centuries the government became directly involved in an iconoclast controversy, periodically seeking to ban the worship of icons but then pulling back amid popular protest; ultimately a settlement restored the position of icons. The government also sponsored many religious buildings, including the great Sophia cathedral.

Byzantine government Despite the contention that this empire was simply a continuation of Rome (the idea of a separate Byzantine label occurred after the fall of the empire; previously, it was simply called the Roman Empire), in fact administration changed considerably. (Among other things, Greek replaced Latin as the official language of state.) Emphasis on the emperor and his divine appointment increased; a senate institution remained but was powerless. Regional units, or *themes,* were regularized and their leaders wielded both civil and military functions. Byzantine bureaucrats proved fairly adaptable, though

they depended heavily on support from the imperial court. Jobs in the upper bureaucracy constituted a clear path to aristocratic status, though there was competition from the existing nobility as well. (Despite the label "byzantine" applied to unwieldy bureaucracy, it is not clear that the actual administration was particularly cumbersome.) In terms of functions, besides religion, the Empire emphasized its role in jurisprudence; Justinian, an early emperor, issued an extensive revision of the Roman law code, which had great staying power. Much attention went to warfare, both aggressive, as the empire tried but failed to recapture more Roman territory, and then defensive. Diplomacy gained a new role as the Empire struggled, often quite successfully, for survival: a "Bureau of Barbarians" oversaw relationships with other states as well as information-gathering and outright spying. The appointment of diplomatic envoys, and the reception of representatives from other states, constituted one of the important innovations of the Empire, later influencing diplomatic practices in other parts of Europe. The state also regulated internal and foreign trade, and maintained a monopoly on the issuance of coinage. A great deal of attention was devoted to provisioning the capital, Constantinople, seeking to keep down the price of grain – along with religion and diplomacy, perhaps the government's most distinctive function.

Legacy Byzantine government practices and claims influenced other states in the Balkans – often in direct rivalry with the empire. The ultimate defeat of the empire by the Ottoman Turks, during the 15th century, led obviously to a major religious change, but the Turks also maintained a number of administrative practices. In the long run, however, the most important imperial aftermath involved the development of the Russian monarchy.

Government in postclassical Russia Government in what is now western Russia and Ukraine – or Kievan Rus' – was a new phenomenon as Slavic peoples settled to agriculture and trade increased. The state operated from the 9th century until the Mongol conquests of the 13th, constituting a loose and fairly loose federation of various Slavic and other groups under the Rurik dynasty. At its height in the 10th and 11th centuries the monarchy was able to decree Christianity as the official religion and issue the region's first law code. Though kings like Vladimir claimed considerable powers (he was the convert to Christianity who ordered his subject to follow suite), royal rule depended on collaboration of regional nobles and a number of municipal governments (one of which, Novgorod, ultimately split away as an independent republic). Byzantine influence showed, however, not only in conversion to Orthodox Christianity and close church-state relations, but In claims to royal authority and ultimately to the idea of empire – though this would emerge more clearly after the Mongol period when Russian rulers, now centered in Moscow, took on the title tsar, or Caesar.

Study questions

1. How did the government implications of Christianity and Islam compare?
2. What were the most distinctive government features of the Byzantine empire?
3. How was the Russian state different from the Byzantine during the postclassical period?

Further reading

Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: a political history* (Longman, 1997)

Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Western Europe

Overview The postclassical period helped establish some durable or at least recurrent features in Western government, including the persistent rivalries among various monarchies and feudatories. Despite one imperial effort, internal competition and frequent warfare marked the Western political tradition after the fall of Rome. Most of the period was marked by the importance of feudalism, reflecting an inability to form effective government structures at a more complex level; most kings were essentially figureheads beyond their own small region. Compared to many Asian societies, and also the Byzantines, West European government remained rather rudimentary through the whole period; and of course in much of northern Europe it was in fact a fairly new institution. But feudalism proved to be a building block that gradually allowed the construction of somewhat more successful central monarchies; yet it also served as the basis for the emergence of the first iterations of the institution of parliament. Western

Europe was not the first region to develop formal councils that could serve as a check on monarchs, but the early parliamentary tradition arguably proved particularly promising. Overall, political developments in the postclassical centuries center on forms of government and geographical coverage; there were few innovations in function, and indeed governments struggled to recapture some standard functions during much of the period.

Charlemagne and the failure of empire Conquests by a Frankish king, Charlemagne, in the decades around 800 CE, briefly created a large state, after several centuries of decentralized rule following the fall of Rome in the West. The empire included present-day France, the Low Countries, western Germany and northern Italy. The pope gave Charlemagne the title of Emperor (partly to establish that a secular ruler was subject to religious authorization). The new government took a number of measures, for example establishing a more stable currency. Charlemagne established a palace school and encouraged Christian monasteries to expand their educational functions. Actual administration, however, was decentralized – because of limited resources and lack of trained officials. Emissaries were sent out from the capital, but outlying areas were ruled by separate lords. An annual council brought this group together, and here the emperor could lay out policy; but in later years the council largely focused on complaints from the nobility. Most important, the empire could not hold together: over time, heirs split it into separate units. The idea of an empire persisted in Germany and parts of Italy: the so-called Holy Roman Empire would last until the early 19th century. But this was not an effective government, as Germany and Italy largely devolved into separate regional and city states. Voltaire correctly noted that this was not holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire. More effective governments would gradually develop elsewhere, particularly in France, England and later Spain; though independent city states in Italy forged particularly effective administrative units that would ultimately serve as the framework for the Renaissance, with far wider functions than feudal or royal states managed in the period.

Role of the church Christianity played a complex role in West European government. Early in the period the Roman Pope established a separate power base, ruling a regional state around Rome itself (of varying size): this provided some protection from control by secular rulers. For the most part, church and state worked in harmony throughout much of the region. At key points, kings and lords actively accepted a religious mission: thus the French king headed a force that attacked a religious heresy in southern France, while at the end of the 11th century many rulers responded to the pope's appeal for a crusade to free the Holy Land from Muslim control. But secular and religious authorities could be at odds as well. At many points the Church tried to restrict endemic warfare, as well as seeking to protect religious authorities from attack, through the Peace of God and Truce of God movements (with limited results). A famous controversy in the 12th century pitted the Pope against the Holy Roman Emperor: the latter had assumed the right to name bishops and use them as state functionaries, and the Pope intervened, excommunicating the emperor and forcing him to back down. In other words, the notion of some religion-state separation, which placed limits on the authority of the Western state, has real merit, though it should not be overdrawn.

Feudalism Through much of the period, but particularly until the 11th or 12th century (with Charlemagne's empire as partial interruption), feudalism was the dominant political form throughout most of the region. The collapse of Roman authority, plus intermittent invasions from groups like the Vikings, led local landlords to form their own militaries, offering protection to lesser lords and peasants. Most peasants were serfs, regulated by a combination of village councils and their landlords. Lords themselves, able to afford horses and weapons, typically grouped in a hierarchy, pledging loyalty and military service as vassals to a regional superior in return for defense. Vassals typically made some token payments to the lord; they were supposed to advise him; and in return the lord helped adjudicate disputes, even providing a jury of peers in some instances, and of course sought to defend from attack. The system was imperfect, incapable of preventing frequent disorder and served as a source of many regional wars among feudal rivals. Over time, however, it did improve stability in some regions. As conditions improved, small cities began to redevelop as well. Some were ruled by feudal lords, but a number of independent urban governments emerged as well, another political element.

Feudal monarchies Many parts of Europe remained locked in this decentralized system through the postclassical period and beyond; this was particularly true in Germany, but also the Low Countries. But in France and England, and later Spain after Christian "reconquest" from Islamic rule, more effective

monarchies gradually developed. In France, the king was essentially just a major feudal lord at the outset, though with vague claims to greater authority. Gradually, and particularly from the 12th century onward, kings were able, through conquests and marriage alliances, to acquire more territory and make a number of other lords their vassals. Control of their own landed estates gave them a revenue base (only gradually would wider taxation become possible, with the feudal lords largely exempt). With this, kings could gradually hire some officials of their own, mainly from townspeople, while still depending on nobles for much local administration. Small military forces complemented what could be raised through feudal loyalty. The king even established a French navy, and began calling himself King of France rather than King of the Franks. Kings also began to expand a small network of law courts, offering royal justice instead of relying on more local jurisprudence. Revival of interest in Roman law encouraged a wider judicial function as well. Limited public works – for example, building defensive walls around Paris – and some charity to the poor complemented the expanding government role. Feudal monarchy in England was somewhat better organized after the conquest by Norman forces in 1066: the king was able to name sheriffs as royal officials in outlying regions. Here too, however, the king ruled only in some balance with powerful feudal lords. Only later for example would the state be able to claim monopoly of force against the feudal tradition of separate regional militaries. Not surprisingly, the feudal heritage also imbued most kings with a strong sense of military mission, not only in defense of royal prerogatives but in competition with other rulers. A long, recurrent war between England and France was one result of this orientation.

Parliaments The feudal tradition also explains the rise of parliaments. Expanding royal claims butted against the belief that vassals should have some voice through councils with the lord – and that the lord had no right to impose additional levies on the lords. As early as the 11th century, a parliament formed in Barcelona to advised the ruler of Catalonia – laying some claim to be the first such body in world history. More influential was the emergence of parliament in England. Early in the 13th century an unpopular English king, embroiled in war the France, sought to raise additional revenues. His nobles rebelled, and defeated royal forces in 1215, forcing the king to accept the Great Charter (Magna Carta). This document restricted royal power in several ways (protecting not only the feudal lords, but town governments and Church leaders as well), with some vague references to more general rights. It stipulated that a Council should be established, whose permission would be essential for any additional taxation. While this was not directly followed up, a first English parliament did meet in 1265. Similar bodies arose in France (and also several separate French provinces), many German regions and elsewhere. These were not modern bodies. They met irregularly, depending on royal initiative, and many countries experienced long periods when central parliaments were not called at all. Membership was divided by three or four estates: nobles, leading churchmen, and top town officials fleshed these out. There was no suggestion of wider democracy. However, a tradition was established that imposed some limits on royal authority at the time, at least periodically, and that would be expanded later on.

Evaluation This was an early stage in the development of the Western state, and by many measures much of Europe was badly ruled through much of the period, though with some improvements over time. Some historians have recently claimed that Europe's divisions were a blessing in disguise, encouraging creative competition and innovation compared to the more stable empires in other parts of the world. Relatively limited government authority gave freer rein to businessmen and other innovators. The system also, however, encouraged disorder and war, not only in this period but long afterward.

Study questions

1. Why did Europe depend so heavily on a feudal political system?
2. How were some kings able to carve out greater authority amid feudalism?
3. What were key differences between medieval and modern parliaments?

Further reading

Jena-Pierre Poly and Eric Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation, 900-1200* (Holmes and Meier, 1991)

Clifford Backman, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2003)

John Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300-1500* (Cambridge University Press, 2009

Sub-Saharan Africa

Overview This was a major period in African political history, particularly through the establishment and expansion of several important states in West Africa. A government tradition had already been set in the northeast along the upper Nile, partly in relationship to the Egyptian state, and a Christian monarchy in Ethiopia continued to flourish in the postclassical period. At the same time, large stretches of the subcontinent remained stateless, some with hunting and gathering societies, others with flourishing agricultural economies but without formal government. A few states arose about which information is lacking: a major fortification called Great Zimbabwe, in the southeast, must have served as an important royal capital, in a city that may have housed 10,000 people; but there is no further record, and the kingdom ultimately failed for some reason. But along much of the Indian Ocean coast new trading activities prompted important local governments, while the West African empires constituted the most striking innovation.

Ethiopia Successive Ethiopian kingdoms in the period, following the collapse of more expansive governments in Axum, were frequently isolated because of the spread of Islam in surrounding territories. At one point the government was clearly a theocracy. At another, a major kingdom actually did not establish a capital city, but moved among tent complexes. Though beleaguered, Ethiopia did send emissaries to Jerusalem, where they had contact with European crusaders, and after the collapse of the crusades at one point dispatched a large delegation to various parts of Europe, seeking help against Muslim encroachments. This was a lively period in Ethiopian history, but less in terms of government than religion and art.

The Swahili coast Expanding trade with the Middle East formed the basis for at least 35 city-states along the Indian Ocean coast. All were monarchies, ruled by a sultan; some clearly sponsored significant public works, building some of the largest structures in the whole subcontinent. Bureaucrats were drawn from the large merchant class. Interestingly, with one exception, the city states made no effort to conquer the neighboring African interior, instead relying entirely on trade relations. The network would be violently disrupted by the Portuguese in the 16th century.

West African kingdoms: Ghana Increasing trade between West Africa and North Africa, and particularly the introduction of the camel in the 3rd century CE, formed the basis for more complex societies. The empire of Ghana began to take shape from about 300 onward, though its origins are not clear (and in general, direct records are lacking for the whole period). Rulers began to accumulate considerable, power and pomp – the latter long a feature of African monarchies. When they held audiences to hear grievances from their subjects, they wore splendid garments and were surrounded by many gold objects, with hosts of pages in attendance. Their revenues derived from taxes on trade and from control over gold production; kings claimed possession of all gold nuggets, leaving gold dust for wider use. Kings also developed some control over vassal states, in what was, overall, a decentralized regime. (Some historians have compared this to European kingdoms in the same period, though the African states were larger and lacked formal feudalism.) Bureaucrats were drawn in part from the royal family, but later Muslim officials began to gain ground (some directly from North Africa) – because they had greater experience and also brought literacy. But the state never developed a religious mission, as most subjects remained polytheist, and education remained largely local and oral.

Mali It is not clear why Ghana declined – though the formation of rival neighboring monarchies may have played a role. By the 13th century another empire took shape, with the military expansion of a local kingdom. The Empire of Mali became the largest territorial unit in West Africa, famous for the wealth of its rulers – displayed among other things in the famous pilgrimage of Mansa Musa to Mecca in 1324-6, where the amount of gold he brought with him prompted significant inflation to Egypt. Like Ghana, the empire ruled over a number of vassal states, whose rulers, defeated in battle, retained power on condition of loyalty to the emperor. A periodic “great assembly” brought delegates from many different clans, presumably with some powers of advice. Government reforms included measures to improve the treatment of slaves and prisoners. Local villages and towns also elected their own leaders, though only from certain families, with little interference from the central state. At the regional level, appointed governors did receive direction from the imperial government, though here too selection was reflected separate regional procedures, not central appointment – though the officials were subject to approval by

the emperor and might be replaced if he found them unreliable. Even currencies were regional rather than empire-wide. Government revenues centered on taxing all trade in gold, copper and salt. The emperor commanded a full-time army, and each region was required to fill its quota of soldiers. Even more than Ghana, imperial administration employed a large number of Muslim officials, responsible among other things for considerable record-keeping.

Legacy Mali began to decline in the 15th century and disappeared entirely two centuries later, increasingly challenged by rival kingdoms. But the political tradition of West Africa persisted, as a number of regional monarchies formed, again frequently emphasizing a combination of royal splendor with administrative decentralization in practice, with government functions focused on provision of justice (including elaborate royal audiences) and military activities, along with protection of trade. Some historians have argued that the tradition of royal splendor would survive in a valuation of "Big Man" rule in African politics. After 1500, the existence of strong states in many parts of West Africa limited and conditioned activities by European traders who had to negotiate their entry.

Study questions

1. What were the principal forms of government that developed in sub-Saharan Africa during the post-classical period?
2. Why were most governments either fairly local or considerably decentralized?

Further reading

Dierk Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa* (J.H. Roll, 2004)

Nehemia Levtzion and Jay Spaulding, *Medieval West Africa: views from Arab scholars and merchants* (Markus Wiener, 2003)

F.-X. Fauvelle, *The Golden Rhinoceros: histories of the African Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 2018)

Pre-Columbian Government in the Americas

Overview Many parts of the Americas did not have governments during the postclassical centuries, even in areas where some agriculture was practiced (often along with hunting). Most tribes in North America determined leadership through kinship relations (often, on a matrilineal basis; and women sometimes served as leaders directly). There was no settled state. Exceptions, of course, focus attention on the great civilizations of central America and the Andes. Here, important government structures developed. Because they were later almost literally decapitated by Spanish invasion and the ravages of epidemic disease, they did not leave a clear political legacy for the regions later on. And, on the whole, the governmental institutions were less impressive than the cultural and economic achievements of these regions, operating as they were with an essentially Neolithic technology. Key features of government recalled elements common in the Middle East and Egypt in the early civilization period, including the emphasis on the divine qualities of rulers.

Mayans Mayan government combined a belief in the god-like qualities of rulers (along with the important role for priests in the government hierarchy), substantial reliance on the aristocracy as the source of subordinate officials, and considerable decentralization. Mayan governments took shape as independent city states, ruling the surrounding countryside, rather than any overarching imperial structure. Rulers were usually drawn from a single family, with women occasionally taking the role on the basis of inheritance if the next king was not yet adult, or was away for war. After about 250 CE, or what is called the Classic period, there were as many as 72 separate city-states, though not necessarily at a single point in time. Governments concentrated on judicial functions and local public works (including roads and temple building); while there was no professional military, military service was required when necessary. Over time, while the lack of political unification did not prevent cultural cohesion and extensive internal and external trading, it almost certainly contributed to the decline of the Mayan system.

Aztecs Aztec rule, developing fully in the 15th century, continued the pattern of considerable decentralization. Conquered vassal states and their leaders were allowed to maintain operation, conditional on paying tribute to the Aztec rulers – a system that provoked a level of resentment that, later, contributed to the weakness of Aztec response to Spanish invasion. The city-state system essentially continued, with Aztec expectations simply an overlay, with local kings representing the ruling aristocratic dynasty. Villages under city-state rule chose their own headmen for local administration. After 1428 the Aztecs did apparently develop a small central bureaucracy – needed among other things to keep tribute records. The attribution of god-like status to the ruler continued in this system. The principal Aztec leader, or *Huey Tlatoani,* concentrated on external affairs – tribute, diplomacy and expansion – while another official, a close relative, handled the administration of the capital city. Both officials, though not priests, had important religious ritual tasks. A four-person aristocratic council provided advice. The central government also established some supervision – including military supervision – over the tribute states, mainly to assure the collection and storage of tribute. Because local nobles were exempt from tribute payments, they often collaborated with the system. Like the Mayans, the Aztecs emphasized a written law codes, which specified various types of crimes (including nudity and drunkenness) and the appropriate punishments, which were only to be administered by state officials. Appeals from local courts to more centralized courts were possible. Ultimate judicial authority rested with the Huey Tlatoani, who was responsible for appointing lesser provincial judges.

Incas As with the Aztecs, the Inca empire was imposed by force, expanding rapidly from about 1000 CE onward. Inca government lacked a writing system, and kept tax records through an intricate system of knotted ropes, with decimal calculations. But this intriguing constraint did not prevent a variety of government functions – including even relocating some conquered populations to improve territorial integration. As in central America, tribute payments from conquered regions were required. But in return the Inca government facilitated food exchange and storage (vital in a mountainous terrain), state-sponsored religious feasts and rituals, and employment on public works (including an elaborate road network covering 40,000 kilometers). Kings were hereditary, and at points two may have shared rule; queens also had considerable powers, particularly in selecting the heir to the throne. The ruler, or *Sapa Inca,* was regarded as divine, and after death was mummified and "consulted" on affairs of state. However, conciliating the nobility was vital despite the emphasis on great power (a council of nobles provided advice), and occasionally a king was deposed and even assassinated. The ruler also provided charitable assistance to the populace, and maintained a second title as "Lover and Benefactor of the Poor". Approximately 80 regional administrators oversaw locally-recruited governments, reporting in turn for four overall regional governors. Military garrisons were scattered through the vast empire to assure control. The government conducted annual censuses for tax purposes, and the officials involved were overseen by inspectors. This was, in sum, an impressive government system. But it was imposed by force, by a rather small Inca population ruling up to 10 million people. As with the Aztecs, the combination of compulsion and tribute antagonized many local groups, which in turn facilitated Spanish conquest and the surprisingly rapid collapse of the empire in the 16th century.

Study questions

1. What were the major characteristics of the decentralized political systems of central America?
2. What were the main functions of the central American state?
3. How did the Inca government system differ from its central American counterparts? What features were similar?

Further reading

Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: imperial expansion and political control* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1988)

Michael Smith, *The Aztecs* (2nd ed, Blackwell, 2009)