

Collins

Key Stage 3

Medieval Britain

410–1509

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Knowing History: Student Book 1

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Unit 5: The Crusades

The Islamic world

The religion of **Islam** began around 610, when Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad received his first divine revelation from the angel Gabriel.

Muhammad lived in a trading post on the Western side of the Arabian Peninsula called **Mecca**. By the time of his death in 632, Muhammad's Islamic rule controlled the entire peninsula.

Under the rule of Muhammad's successors, Islam continued to spread with extraordinary speed through both invasion and conversion. Muslim forces had conquered Syria by 638, Persia by 651, and Spain by 711. The world had never seen such an electrifying combination of religious and military force, and by 750, the Islamic Empire extended from Spain's Atlantic coast in the West, to the edge of India in the East.

The caliphate

This Islamic Empire was known as the **caliphate**. It was a single state, and one ruler called the 'caliph' had authority over both religious and political life. For its first one hundred years, the different caliphs managed to retain some central control over the caliphate, but Islam's ongoing expansion made it increasingly difficult to rule. This was made worse during the 10th century when a split emerged between two different forms of Islam, **Sunni** and **Shia**.

This split can be traced back to 661, when fourth caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib (Muhammad's son in law) was assassinated while praying in the Great Mosque of Kufa. Ali's supporters belonged to the Shia branch of Islam, and they believed that the caliphate should be hereditary and pass through Muhammad's family. However, power passed to the Sunni branch, who believed that the role of caliph should not necessarily be reserved for direct descendants of the prophet.

The Sunni Umayyad Caliphate ruled the Islamic world from the city of Damascus until 750. In that year, the Umayyads were replaced by the Abbasids, who were also Sunni. The Abbasids founded a new city called Baghdad to be the centre of their caliphate.

During the Abbasid Caliphate, a powerful new Shia dynasty developed in Egypt, called the Fatimids. The Fatimids were named after Muhammad's daughter Fatima, the wife of Ali ibn Abi Talib, from whom they claimed to be descended. Meanwhile, the grandson of one of the defeated Umayyad caliphs had escaped to Spain, where he established an independent Islamic territory in Europe, called Al-Andalus.



The Great Mosque of Damascus, built during the Umayyad Caliphate

Islamic culture

Covering three continents, the Islamic world of the medieval period gained its wealth and power through trade. Islamic markets, known as bazaars, traded goods from across the known world: carpets and tapestries from Persia; spices from India; silks and porcelain from China; animal furs from central Asia; amber from the Baltic; and gold, ivory and ostrich feathers from West Africa. **Jews**, Christians and a host of other religions were usually allowed to live and worship in peace under Islamic rule, provided they paid tax to their Muslim overlords.

The common Arabic language allowed ideas to spread easily, and a well-educated population of scholars thrived. Urban centres such as Cordoba in Spain, Damascus in Syria, and Baghdad in Iraq became great centres of civilisation and intellectual progress. The Abassid caliph al-Ma'mun created a library in Baghdad, known as the '**House of Wisdom**', where Muslim scholars kept alive the classical texts of Ancient Greece and Rome by translating them into Arabic. The House of Wisdom became an unrivalled centre for the study of mathematics, astronomy, chemistry and philosophy.



Mosaic of the Jameh Mosque of Isfahan, Iran



Traditional carpet shop in Iran

Byzantine Empire

Situated between the Islamic world and Christian Europe was a civilisation known as **Byzantium**. During the fourth century the Roman Empire divided, with Rome as the capital of the western half, and Byzantium (later **Constantinople**) as the capital of the eastern half. After the fall of Rome in 476, the Byzantine Empire survived for another 1000 years. The Byzantines called themselves 'Romans', spoke Greek, and had as their capital the walled city of Constantinople (modern day Istanbul). They were Christians who belonged to the **Eastern Orthodox Church**, and did not recognise the authority of the Catholic Pope.

European visitors to Constantinople spoke of its magnificent buildings. Most spectacular of all was the church of Hagia Sofia, which remained the largest cathedral in the world for 1000 years after it was built. When the French crusader knight Geoffroi de Villehardouin laid eyes on Constantinople during the Fourth **Crusade**, he recorded he "never thought that there could be so rich and powerful a place on earth".

Fact

By the year 1000, Baghdad was home to around 500 000 people. It had running water, beautiful gardens, and schools of law. By contrast, London was a small muddy town, with around 10 000 inhabitants.

Check your understanding

1. How far had the Islamic Empire spread by 750?
2. Why did it become difficult to rule the caliphate as a unified state with a single leader?
3. Why did a split emerge between the Sunni and the Shia branches of Islam?
4. What was the 'House of Wisdom' in Baghdad?
5. How did the Byzantine Empire develop from the Roman Empire?

Unit 5: The Crusades

The First Crusade

The area surrounding the ancient city of **Jerusalem** is sometimes called the '**Holy Land**', and is a place of major religious importance for three world religions.

For Christians, Jerusalem is the home of the Church of the **Holy Sepulchre**, where Jesus is believed to have been buried and resurrected; for Muslims, it is the home of the **Dome of the Rock**, where the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven; and for Jews, it is the home of the Wailing Wall, the last surviving part of King Solomon's temple.

In 638, Jerusalem was conquered by the expanding Islamic Empire. Jerusalem came to be ruled by the Fatimids, who were tolerant of other religions, and for centuries they allowed Christians and Jews to live in the city, and visit as pilgrims. However, this changed in 1079 when a Muslim force known as the **Seljuk Turks** seized control of Jerusalem. The Seljuks, who were Sunni Muslims, originated from central Asia and were fierce warriors famed for their horseback archers. Christians feared that they were not welcome as pilgrims to Jerusalem now that it was under Seljuk rule, and could no longer visit the site of Jesus' resurrection.

Pope Urban II

More worrying still, Seljuk power was spreading through **Asia Minor** and threatening the great Christian city of Constantinople. This led the Byzantine Emperor Alexios Komnenos to ask for help from his Christian brothers in Western Europe. In response, Pope Urban II made one of the most important speeches in medieval history on 27 November 1095.

In the French town of Clermont, Urban II addressed a gathering of important bishops and noblemen. He called on the knights of Europe to form a great army that would travel east, defend Constantinople, defeat the Seljuk Turks, and conquer the Holy Land for the Christians. For those who took part, Urban II promised forgiveness of all previous sins and a guaranteed place in heaven. In doing so, he created a powerful idea: holy war. Ecstatic listeners who were inspired by Pope Urban II's call tore their clothing into crosses and sewed them onto their tunics. To fight in the Crusades became known as 'to take the cross'.



The Dome of the Rock



The Wailing Wall



The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

The First Crusade

An army of perhaps 60 000 men, women and children was assembled from across Europe. It was the largest force Europe had seen since the days of the Roman Empire. Around one in ten were knights, the rest being a travelling city of foot soldiers, cooks, craftsmen, servants, and family members.

This force was led by a group of noblemen from France, Germany and Italy. They included an ageing knight called Raymond of Toulouse who claimed that his eye had been gouged out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and Robert Duke of Normandy, the eldest son of William the Conqueror. Another was Bohemond of Taranto, a giant of a man from Southern Italy, and one of the most feared knights in Europe at the time.

In August 1096, the crusaders began their march into the unknown territory of Asia Minor, stopping first at Constantinople where the Emperor Alexios Komnenos gave them food and supplies. In June 1097, they took the holy city Nicaea, and returned it to Byzantine rule. In June 1098, after an eight-month siege they captured the fortified city of Antioch. Marching through endless miles of hot, dry terrain towards the Holy Land, the crusaders quickly ran out of food and water, and survived by looting nearby villages.

Fact

During the long winter of 1098, starving crusaders trapped in the city of Antioch ate seeds from horse manure to survive. Crusaders in the nearby city of Maarat were said to have resorted to cannibalism.

Siege of Jerusalem

After three years and 3000 miles of gruelling warfare, the crusaders finally reached Jerusalem on 7 June 1099. Starvation, casualties, and desertion had depleted their army to 15 000 men, and 1300 knights. They camped outside the walls of Jerusalem for a month to regain their strength and build siege engines. One knight, named Godfrey of Bouillon, built a 20 metre tall siege tower. Godfrey took his tower to the less defended northern walls of the city, and on 15 July he broke through the Muslim defences. The crusaders flooded into the city.

Once inside Jerusalem, the crusaders massacred the Muslim and Jewish population, killing, torturing and burning alive an estimated 10 000 men, women and children. It was reported that blood ran through the streets up to their ankles, and six months later the city still reeked of death and decay. This butchery by the crusader knights shocked the Muslim world.



Modern illustration of the siege of Jerusalem

Check your understanding

1. Why is Jerusalem a place of major importance for three world religions?
2. What did the Pope promise to Christian knights who agreed to take part in the First Crusade?
3. Who led the First Crusade?
4. Why did the crusaders resort to looting as they made their way towards Jerusalem?
5. How did the crusaders behave once they had broken into Jerusalem?

Unit 5: The Crusades

Crusader states

During their progress through the Holy Land, the crusaders established a network of '**crusader states**' ruled by European knights.

Godfrey of Bouillon became the first ruler of Jerusalem, but refused to be crowned. However, when he died in 1100, his power-hungry brother was crowned King Baldwin I of Jerusalem.

To the north, Bohemond of Taranto became the Prince of Antioch, after refusing to hand the city back to the Byzantines. Baldwin I's cousin became the Count of Edessa. The crusaders captured important coastal towns such as Tripoli and **Acre**, ensuring that a steady supply of reinforcements and pilgrims could travel from Europe, across the Mediterranean, and to the Holy Land by sea. They built castles to establish control over their new territories, such as the enormous Krak des Chevaliers in Syria.



Crak des Chevaliers, a crusader castle in Syria

The Second Crusade

One reason for the extraordinary success of the First Crusade was the infighting between different branches of Islam. However, during the 1100s the Muslim response to the Christian invaders became more unified, as they launched a holy war of their own: a **Jihad**.

In 1144, Muslim forces captured the northernmost crusader state, Edessa. In response, Pope Eugenius III called on the knights of Europe to go on a Second Crusade. Two European kings, Louis VII of France and Conrad III of Germany, took the cross and assembled a force of 50 000 men. However, having arrived in the Holy Land they decided to ignore Edessa and attack the larger and wealthier city of Damascus. The Siege of Damascus lasted just three days, before the crusader army withdrew. The crusaders returned to Europe humiliated and empty-handed.

The Third Crusade

After the failure of the Second Crusade, a celebrated leader named Salah al-Din (known in the West as Saladin) rose to power, uniting much of the Muslim world. In 1187, he destroyed almost the entire crusader army at the Battle of Hattin, and took the city of Jerusalem. Saladin captured 50 more crusader strongholds between 1187 and 1189, including the port city of Acre.

News of Jerusalem's fall shocked Europe, and a fresh crusade was called for. Setting off in 1191, the Third Crusade was led by King Richard I of England (known as the 'Lionheart'), King Frederick Barbarossa of Germany



Statue of Richard the Lionheart outside the Houses Of Parliament in Westminster, London, England

(meaning 'red beard'), and King Phillip II of France. Barbarossa died before reaching the Holy Land after drowning during a river crossing in Anatolia. Richard conquered the island of Cyprus on the way to the Holy Land, and arrived in June 1191. Here, he found King Phillip, the remainder of the German army, and the survivors of the Battle of Hattin laying siege to Acre.

Under the leadership of Richard, the crusaders forced Saladin to surrender Acre on 12 July 1191. As part of the peace negotiations, Saladin promised to return to the crusaders a relic believed to be part of the Cross of Christ, which had been captured at Hattin. Saladin delayed in fulfilling the agreement. So, Richard marched 2600 Muslim soldiers outside of Acre's city walls and executed them in full sight of Saladin and his army.

Having won the Siege of Acre, Richard took full control of the crusader force. He marched on Jerusalem, and by January 1192 was just 12 miles from the city. By now however, Richard was ill, his soldiers were exhausted, and the weather was dreadful. Doubting his ability to take the city, Richard decided to turn back towards Acre.

Though fierce rivals, Richard and Saladin grew to respect each other's military ability, and their exhausted armies agreed to a truce in the summer of 1192. Jerusalem remained in Muslim hands, but the crusaders were allowed to keep the valuable strip of coastal land around Acre. In addition, Christians were given full permission to visit Jerusalem on pilgrimage.

Fact

Richard the Lionheart decided to conquer Cyprus after his sister and fiancée were shipwrecked on the island, and imprisoned by its Byzantine ruler Isaac Komnenos. Richard imprisoned Isaac, freed his fiancée, and married her on the island.

Saladin the Merciful

Born to a Kurdish family in Northern Iraq, Saladin grew up to be a great military leader and was made **Sultan** of Egypt in 1171.

Though a fierce warrior, Saladin was respected for showing mercy towards his enemies. Having conquered Jerusalem, Saladin ordered that his men should not kill civilians or loot their possessions. Enemy knights were given the chance to buy their freedom, or be sold as slaves. During a battle at Jaffa, Richard the Lionheart's horse was killed beneath him, and Saladin responded by sending him a new horse. When Richard was suffering from a terrible fever during the summer of 1192, Saladin sent him peaches and sherbet cooled with snow from nearby mountains to help him recover. Saladin intended to visit Mecca on a pilgrimage at the end of the Third Crusade, but he died of a fever in 1193.



Modern Depiction of Saladin from 16th-century France

Check your understanding

1. What did the Crusader knights establish having conquered Jerusalem?
2. Why did the Second Crusade end in failure?
3. Why did Richard the Lionheart decide against laying siege to Jerusalem in 1192?
4. What was agreed in the 1192 peace between Richard the Lionheart and Saladin?
5. How did Saladin gain his reputation for being merciful?