



George Sansom

**A History  
of Japan  
to 1334**

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# A History of Japan to 1334

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## A History of Japan to 1334 George Bailey Sansom

This is a straightforward narrative of the development of Japanese civilization to 1334 by the author of *Japan: A Short Cultural History*. While complete in itself, it is also the first volume of a three-volume work which will be the first large-scale, comprehensive history of Japan.

Taken as a whole, the projected history represents the culmination of the life work of perhaps the most distinguished historian now writing on Japan. Unlike the renowned *Short Cultural History*, it is concerned mainly with political and social phenomena and only incidentally touches on religion, literature, and the arts. The treatment is primarily descriptive and factual, but the author offers some pragmatic interpretations and suggests comparisons with the history of other peoples.

*A History of Japan to 1334* describes the growth from tribal origins of an organized state on a Chinese model, gives a picture of the life of the Royal Court, and examines the conflict between a polished urban nobility and a warlike rural gentry. It traces the evolution of an efficient system of feudal government which deprived the sovereign of all but his ritual functions and the prestige of his ancestry. The structure of Japanese feudal society is depicted in some detail and explained in terms of its internal stresses and its behavior in peace and war, especially during the period of the Mongol attacks in the last decades of the thirteenth century. The volume ends with the collapse of the feudal government at Kamakura under the attack of ambitious rivals.

## A History of Japan to 1334 Details

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## From Reader Review A History of Japan to 1334 for online ebook

### Sydney says

A thorough and scholarly history of early Japan. I loved pairing it with some early literature so I understood the background of history, religion, politics and culture. Prepared me well for my visit to Japan this summer.

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### Rob says

Well worth the time investment, but too dry for anyone without more than a passing interest in early Japanese history. That said, this "old school" scholar has contributed much with this volume.

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### Matt says

For an unnecessary college class "Japanese Warrior Government". I just had to take it even though I didn't need it. Good read, but it's a history book.

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### Robert says

Fifty years later and it's still the only comprehensive history of Japan in English.

That I know of.

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### Michael Finocchiaro says

I visited Japan about 10 or 12 times on business and became fascinated with the nation and its peoples. In a burst of curiosity, I started reading Japanese literature (lots of reviews here on GR on my Japanese shelves) but quickly realised that I knew next to nothing about the history of this incredible country. I was lucky to discover the work of George Sansom who wrote a series of excellent books about Japanese history. In a history of Japan to 1334, we learn of the migration of Chinese and Korean peninsular peoples to Japan in around the 5th C and the existence of the Ainu aborigines that were treated poorly (as all native peoples are in periods of colonial expansion - they are still in the 21st C treated as a national shame, have incredibly high unemployment and are pushed into lost hamlets in the hinterlands of Hokkaido). Due to the ocean separating the Korean peninsula from Japan, the culture grew to be completely unique with its own identity. One persistent theme in Japanese culture is the dualism between knowing that they have Chinese roots and that the Chinese civilisation gave them their written language (kanji) and was one of the oldest most developed cultures in the world and their own innate sense of uniqueness and superiority. It is a theme that comes back again and again. In the meantime, this book explains the early society that developed into having an emperor endowed with divine adulation and a highly developed culture around the court in Nara and later Kyoto. The high cultural period of the Heian which produced one of the marvels of world literature, The Tale of Genji, is

described in detail.

The book is highly readable and for me the best way to understand the origins of Japan to the middle ages.

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### **Janel says**

This is a well written & great book on Japanese history

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### **Richard says**

Even for a history book, this was pretty dry until Sansom reached the era of the Genpei Wars and the rise of the Bakufu under the first Minamoto shoguns. Since I was especially interested in the Heian period that was a bit of a disappointment to me. I don't know if the difference was due to the Kamakura period being so well documented that Sansom had more material to draw from, or he was just so much more interested in that period personally that it showed in the text, but to me the demarcation was pretty dramatic.

All that said, I was pulled right into the story of the creation of the samurai class and the rise of the Shogunate as the dominant political entity under Minamoto Yoritomo. Especially interesting was the role that Yoritomo's wife, Masako, played in keeping the fledgling Bakufu together after his death, and the different perspective on Yoritomo's brother, the nearly legendary Minamoto no Yoshitsune, than is the norm for that tragic story. Well worth reading for anyone interested in Japanese history of the period.

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### **Hiroshi Sasaki says**

I'm prepping a December pilgrimage to my birthplace and ancestral burial grounds, so I'm doing the research right now.... Sansom provides a phenomenal social history from early pre-history to the fall of the Kamakura "bakufu," the competing dual government system between the Emperor's court of Kyoto (also a dual system with a titular & symbolic Emperor and a "cloistered" or "retired" emperor who actually has the royal power) and the warrior government of Kamakura.

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