

# Developments in Europe

*I should not wish to be Aristotle if this were to separate me from Christ.*

—Peter Abelard, Letter 17 to Heloise (1141)

**Essential Question** How did the beliefs and practices of the predominant religions, agricultural practices, and political decentralization affect European society from c. 1200 to c. 1450?

**A**s the Roman Empire declined in power in the 5th and 6th centuries, Western Europe entered the Middle Ages, sometimes called the medieval period. Throughout Europe, trade declined, intellectual life receded, and the united Roman state was replaced by smaller kingdoms that frequently fought one another for control of territory. In response, European kings, lords, and peasants worked out agreements to provide for common defense. Only the Roman Catholic Church remained powerful in most of Europe from Roman times to the 16th century.

However, between 1000 to 1450, learning and trade began to revive in Europe. This era is called the High Middle Ages. Like many scholars of this period, Peter Abelard studied classical thinkers such as Aristotle and sometimes criticized the Church, but he remained a faithful throughout his life.

## Feudalism: Political and Social Systems

European civilization in the Middle Ages was characterized by a decentralized political organization based on a system of exchanges of land for loyalty known as **feudalism**. Lacking a strong government, people needed some protection from bandits, rival lords, and invaders such as the Vikings from northern Europe. The core of feudalism was a system of mutual obligations:

- A monarch, usually a king, granted tracts of land, called *fiefs*, to lords. In return, a lord became a king's *vassal*, a person who owed service to another person of higher status.
- Lords then provided land to knights. In return, knights became vassals of the lord, and pledged to fight for the lord or king.
- Lords also provided land and protection to peasants. In return, peasants were obligated to farm the lord's land and provide the lord with crops and livestock, and to obey the lord's orders.

Feudalism provided some security for peasants, equipment for warriors, and land to those who served a lord. Since the entire system was based on agriculture, wealth was measured in land rather than in cash.

The feudal system incorporated a *code of chivalry*—an unwritten set of rules for conduct focusing on honor, courtesy, and bravery—as a way to resolve disputes. Since women were to be protected, the code put them on a pedestal while not investing them with any significant additional importance. In practice, women did not have many rights. (Connect: Compare European feudalism and Japanese feudalism. See Topic 1.1.)

**Manorial System** Large fiefs or estates were also referred to as **manors**. The **manorial system** provided economic self-sufficiency and defense. The manor produced everything that people living on it required, limiting the need for trade or contact with outsiders. Many serfs spent their entire lives on a single manor, little aware of events in the rest of Europe.

Manor grounds were small villages that often included a church, a blacksmith shop, a mill, and wine presses. They included the homes of peasants known as **serfs**. Serfs, while not enslaved, were tied to the land. This meant they could not travel without permission from their lords. Nor could they marry without their lord's approval. In exchange for protection provided by the lord of the manor, they paid tribute in the form of crops, labor, or, in rare cases, coins. Children born to serfs also became serfs.

As both climate and technology slowly improved, the amount of arable or farmable land gradually increased. Agriculture became more efficient near the end of the Middle Ages. The **three-field system**, in which crops were rotated through three fields, came into use.

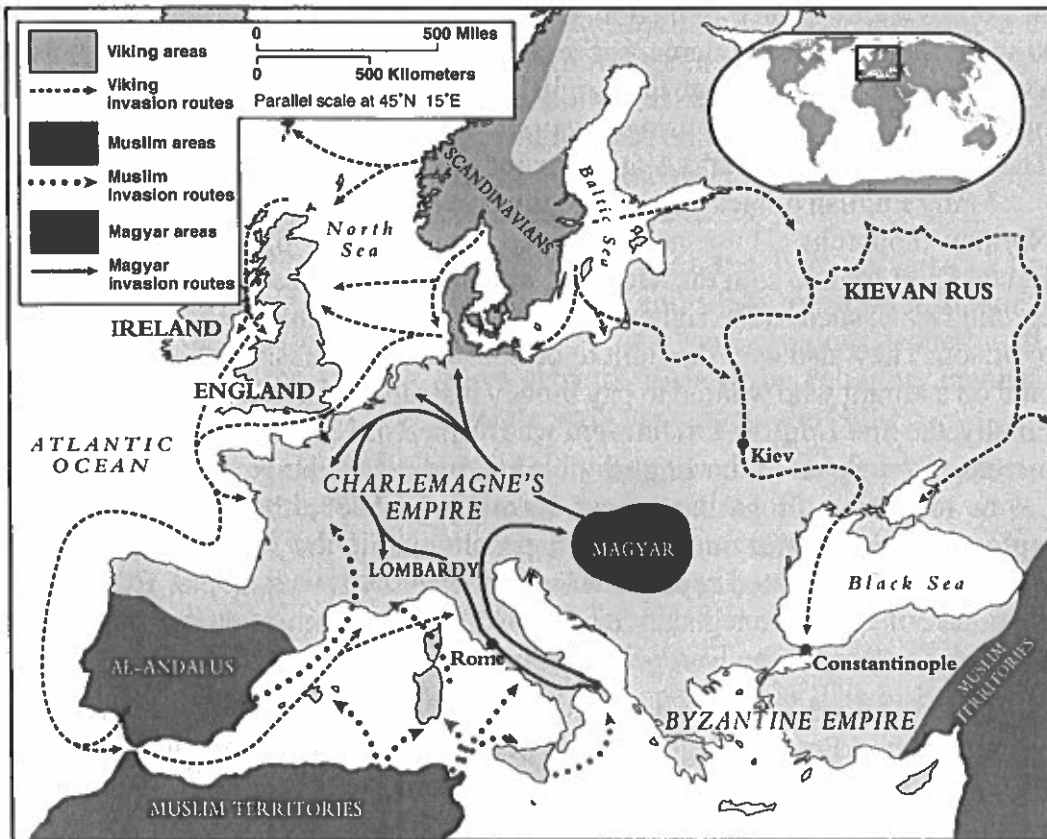
- One field was planted with wheat or rye, crops that provided food.
- A second field was planted with legumes such as peas, lentils, or beans. These made the soil more fertile by adding nitrogen to it.
- A third field was allowed to remain fallow, or unused, each year.

Technological developments included windmills and new types of plows. Heavier plows with wheels worked well in the dense soil north of the Alps, while lighter plows worked better in southern Europe. These changes promoted population growth.

## Political Trends in the Later Middle Ages

In the later Middle Ages, monarchies grew more powerful at the expense of feudal lords by employing their own bureaucracy and a military. These employees worked directly for the king or queen. (In contrast, in modern countries such as the United States, bureaucrats and soldiers work for the country, not the chief executive.) The lands these monarchs collected under their control, particularly in England and France, were beginning to look like the modern countries of Europe.

## Europe in the Middle Ages



**France** King Philip II (ruled 1180–1223), was the first to develop a real bureaucracy. Yet it was not until Philip IV (ruled 1285–1314) that the first **Estates-General** met. The Estates-General was a body to advise the king that included representatives from each of the three legal classes, or **estates**, in France: the clergy, nobility, and commoners. Although the French kings consulted this Estates-General when necessary, they did not exact regular taxes from the upper two estates, the clergy and nobility. Consequently, the Estates-General had little power. The clergy and nobility felt little responsibility to protect a government that they were not financing, a problem that only continued to increase in France up to the eve of the French Revolution of 1789.

**Holy Roman Empire** The German king **Otto I** was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 962, hearkening back to Charlemagne's designation as Emperor of the Romans. Otto's successors survived the power struggle with the papacy over the **lay investiture controversy** of the 11th and 12th centuries. This dispute was over whether a secular (non-religious) leader, rather than the pope, could invest bishops with the symbols of office. It was finally resolved in the Concordat of Worms of 1122, when the Church achieved autonomy from secular authorities. The Holy Roman Empire remained vibrant until it was virtually destroyed during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). It lingered on, but with little power. The Empire came to a formal end when the French leader Napoleon Bonaparte invaded central Europe in 1806.

**Norman England** The Normans were descendants of Vikings who settled in northwestern France, a region known as Normandy. In 1066, a Norman king, William the Conqueror, successfully invaded England. This gave him kingdoms on both sides of the English Channel. He presided over a tightly organized feudal system, using royal sheriffs as his administrative officials. The fusion of Normans and Anglo-Saxons created the modern English people.

Many English nobles objected to the power of William and the succeeding Norman monarchs. These nobles forced limits on that power. In 1215, they forced King John to sign the **Magna Carta**, which required the king to respect certain rights, such as the right to a jury trial before a noble could be sentenced to prison. They also won the right to be consulted on the issue of scutage (a tax paid on a knight who wanted to pay money instead of provide military service). Finally, the first **English Parliament** was formed in 1265. These developments increased the rights of the English nobility, but not of the general population.

In the first full parliamentary meeting in 1265, the House of Lords represented the nobles and Church hierarchy, while the House of Commons was made up of elected representatives of wealthy townspeople. Eventually, the power of these two legislative bodies in England became stronger than that of similar bodies on the European continent.

**The Hundred Years' War** Between 1337 and 1453, the rival monarchies of England and France fought a series of battles known as the Hundred Years' War. English archers armed with longbows (about six feet long) helped win several early victories. However, by the end of the conflict, the English retained only the port of Calais in France. Two other important results of the war were on how people saw themselves and how they fought.

- On each side, serving under a monarch fostered a sense of unity among soldiers who often spoke distinct languages or dialects. The war marked another step towards people identifying themselves as “English” or “French” rather than from a particular region.
- The war also demonstrated the spreading use of gunpowder weapons. Gunpowder had been invented by the Chinese and spread west by Mongols.

**Christians versus Muslims** In addition to conquering England, the Normans also conquered Sicily, taking control of that Mediterranean island from Muslims. Muslims had conquered Spain in the 8th century. From that time, Christians had wanted to reconquer it. This effort, called the *reconquista*, occurred over many centuries. It was finally completed in 1492.

## Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages

In 1054, the Christian Church in Europe divided into two branches, a split called the **Great Schism**. The Roman Catholic Church continued to dominate most of Europe for another five centuries, while the Orthodox Church was powerful farther east, from Greece to Russia.

The Roman Catholic Church was the most powerful institution in a Europe divided into hundreds of small political states. Often Church staff were the only people in a community who knew how to read and write. If common people needed something written or read, they asked a Church official to do it. Most manors had a small church and a priest on the grounds. Christianity provided people a shared identity even as vernacular languages, ones spoken by the people in a region, emerged to replace Latin.

**Education and Art** The Church established the first universities in Europe. Because the Church led in the area of education, most philosophers, writers, and other thinkers of the Middle Ages were religious leaders. All artists worked for the Church. Most artwork focused on religious themes, which provided images to help illiterate serfs understand the Bible.

**Church and State** The Church held great power in the feudal system. If a lord displeased the Church, it could pressure the lord in various ways. For example, a local bishop might cancel religious services for his serfs. This angered the serfs, who would demand that the lord give in to the bishop.

Like the Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church had an extensive hierarchy of regional leaders. The regional religious leaders, called bishops, owed allegiance to the pope, the supreme bishop in Rome. The bishops also selected and supervised local priests.

**Monasticism** Although some Christian clergy withdrew to monasteries to meditate and pray, they remained part of the economies of Western Europe. The monasteries had the same economic functions of agriculture and protection as other manors. Women were permitted to become nuns and exerted their influence in the monasteries of the Catholic Church.

**Reform** Although clergy took vows of poverty and supported charities in their communities, the clergy also wielded considerable political influence, and some monasteries became quite wealthy. Wealth and political power led to corruption during the 13th and 14th centuries. Eventually, corruption, as well as theological disagreements, drove reformers such as Martin Luther to take stands that would shatter the unity of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century.

## Christian Crusades

Just as Europeans fought to drive Muslims out of Sicily and Spain, they also sought to reclaim control of the Holy Land, the region of Palestine in the Middle East that contains sites of spiritual significance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. European Christians had enjoyed access to these lands for centuries, even after they came under the control of Muslims.

Social and economic trends of the 11th century added to the pressure among Europeans to invade the Middle East. Rules of **primogeniture**, under which the eldest son in a family inherited the entire estate, left a generation of younger sons with little access to wealth and land. The landed nobles saw

a military campaign as a way to divert the ambitions of these restless nobles as well as unemployed peasants, who often pillaged the lands of neighboring lords. Furthermore, merchants desired unfettered access to trade routes through the Middle East. The combination of these religious, social, and economic pressures resulted in the **Crusades**—a series of European military campaigns in the Middle East between 1095 and the 1200s.

Politics shaped the conduct of Crusades. Tensions between popes and kings strengthened the intention of the Roman Catholic Church to take control. The Church also used its spiritual authority to recruit believers. It granted relief from required acts of atonement and penance and even promised people they would reach heaven sooner if they joined a Crusade. Support came for the Orthodox branch of Christianity as well. Alarmed by news of the persecution of Christian pilgrims by Seljuk Turks, the Orthodox patriarch at Constantinople appealed to Pope Urban II to help retake the Holy Land from Islamic control.

**The First Crusade** Of the four major Crusades, only the first was a clear victory for Christendom. The European army conquered Jerusalem in July 1099. However, Muslim forces under Saladin regained control of Jerusalem in 1187. The Crusades did promote cultural exchange between Europe and the Middle East. The Middle East had a higher standard of living, and European Crusaders increased the demand for Middle Eastern goods. (Connect: Create a timeline tracing the spread of Islam up through the Crusades. See Topic 1.2.)

**The Fourth Crusade** During the fourth and last major Crusade (1202–1204), Venice, a wealthy city-state in northern Italy, had a contract to transport Crusaders to the Middle East, an area known as the Levant. However, Venice was not paid all of what was due, so the Venetians persuaded the Crusader debtors first to sack Zara, an Italian city, and then Constantinople, a major trade competitor of Venice. The Fourth Crusade never made it to the Holy Land. Eventually, Islamic forces prevailed in the Levant.

## Economic and Social Change

The Crusades were just part of the changes occurring in Europe in the late Middle Ages. Local economic self-sufficiency in Europe gradually gave way to an interest in goods from other European areas and from far-flung ports.

**Marco Polo** In the late 13th century **Marco Polo**, an Italian native from Venice, visited the court of Kublai Khan in Dadu, modern-day Beijing. Polo's captivating descriptions of the customs of the people he met intrigued Europeans. For example, he described how Mongols had multiple marriages, drank mare's milk, burned black stones (coal) to heat their homes, and bathed frequently—often three times per week. Curiosity about Asia skyrocketed, stimulating interest in cartography, or mapmaking.

**Social Change** Growth in long-distance commerce changed the social pyramid of Western Europe. Economic success started to rival religious vocation or military service in winning status. This middle class, between the

elite nobles and clergy and the mass of peasants, began to grow. Known as the **bourgeoisie**, or **burghers**, it included shopkeepers, merchants, craftspeople, and small landholders.

**Urban Growth** With renewed commerce came larger cities. The change to the three-field system and other advances in agriculture led to population growth in the late Middle Ages. This agricultural surplus encouraged the growth of towns and of markets that could operate more frequently than just on holidays. As the demand for more labor on the manors increased, the supply decreased. A series of severe plagues swept through Eurasia in the 14th century. In Europe, an outbreak of bubonic plague known as the Black Death killed as many as one-third of the population. The growing demand for labor and the deaths of so many people gave serfs more bargaining power with lords.

Urban growth was hampered after about 1300 by a five-century cooling of the climate known as the **Little Ice Age**. Lower temperatures reduced agricultural productivity, so people had less to trade and cities grew more slowly. The Little Ice Age led to an increase in disease and an increase in unemployment. These, in turn, created social unrest. The crime rate increased, and Jews, and other groups that already faced discrimination, were the victims of scapegoating—being blamed for something over which they had no control.

**Jews** During the Middle Ages, the small Jewish population in Christian Europe began to grow. Many Jews lived in Muslim areas in the Iberian Peninsula (present-day Spain and Portugal) and around the Mediterranean Sea when these areas were overtaken by European Christians. In time, Jews who could afford to moved northward in Europe. Some political leaders, particularly in Amsterdam and other commercial cities, welcomed them, since they brought valuable experience in business and trade.

The Roman Catholic Church also had a policy that Christians could not charge interest on loans to other Christians. However, Jews were not bound by this restriction. With few other economic opportunities, many northern European Jews became moneylenders. The resulting increase in the flow of money contributed to the economic growth of Europe.

However, anti-Jewish sentiment, or **antisemitism**, was widespread among Christians. They thought of Jews as outsiders and untrustworthy. Jews were expelled from England in 1290, France in 1394, Spain in 1492, and Portugal in 1497, as well as from various independent kingdoms and cities in northern and central Europe. Jews expelled from western and central Europe often moved to eastern Europe. While Jews had lived in this region since the 1st century, their numbers increased greatly because of the expulsions.

**Muslims** Like Jews, Muslims faced discrimination in Europe. In 1492, the Spanish king expelled the remaining Muslims in the kingdom who would not convert to Christianity. Many Muslims moved to southeastern Europe. In the 13th century, the Muslim Ottoman Empire expanded its reach from Turkey into the Balkan countries of present-day Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These countries developed large Muslim populations.

While Europe was predominantly Christian, and despite their persecution, both Jews and Muslims helped shape society. Unlike most people in Europe in the Middle Ages, Jews lived in urban areas, and they served as a bridge between Christians and the Muslims whose goods they desired in trade. Contacts with traders in Muslim caliphates opened up a world of trade and a world of ideas for Europeans who had long been self-sufficient and isolated under feudalism.

**Gender Roles** Women found their rights eroding as a wave of patriarchal thinking and writing accompanied the movement from an agricultural society to a more urban one. Even fewer women than men received an education, although women often managed manor accounts. One place where women had greater opportunities to display their skills in administration and leadership was in religious orders. Some women became artisans and members of guilds—associations of craftspeople and merchants—although not all had property rights. Women in Islamic societies tended to enjoy higher levels of equality, particularly in parts of Africa and Southeast Asia.

## Renaissance

The expansion of trade, the growth of an agricultural surplus, and the rise of a middle class able to patronize artists sparked great creativity in Europe. The **Renaissance** was a period characterized by a revival of interest in classical Greek and Roman literature, art, culture, and civic virtue. Scholars recovered and studied decaying manuscripts that had been written many centuries earlier. Developed in 1439, Johannes Gutenberg's movable-type printing press initiated a revolution in print technology. The printing press allowed manuscripts to be mass-produced at relatively affordable costs. It fostered a growth in literacy and the rapid spread of ideas.

One characteristic of the Renaissance was the interest in **humanism**, the focus on individuals rather than God. Humanists sought education and reform. They began to write secular literature. Cultural changes in the Renaissance, such as the increased use of the vernacular language, propelled the rise of powerful monarchies, the centralization of governments, and the birth of nationalism. (Connect: List three elements of classical Greece and Rome revived by the Renaissance. See Prologue.)

**Southern Renaissance** In the regions of Italy and Spain, church patronage supported the Renaissance. For example, the writer Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) used a religious framework for *The Divine Comedy*, which features hell, purgatory, and heaven. Nevertheless, his fearlessness in criticizing corrupt religious officials and his willingness to use Italian vernacular instead of Latin reflected his independence from the Roman Catholic Church. Wealthy families, such as the Medicis of Florence, used their money to support painters, sculptors, and architects.

**Northern Renaissance** By 1400, the Renaissance spirit spread to northern Europe. While many Renaissance artists emphasized piety in their work, others



emphasized human concerns. Geoffrey Chaucer, writing in *The Canterbury Tales* in the late 1300s, portrayed a microcosm of middle-class occupations in England, including several Church positions. His satirical writings portrayed monks who loved hunting and overly sentimental nuns. Like Dante a century earlier, Chaucer chose a vernacular, Middle English, for this work, although many of his other writings were in Latin.

Leading Cities During the Renaissance in Europe



## The Origins of Russia

During the late Middle Ages in Eastern Europe, extensive trade in furs, fish, and grain connected people from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean to Central Asia. The city-state at the center of this trade was Kievan Rus, based in what is today Kiev, Ukraine. Because it adopted the Orthodox Christianity, it maintained closer cultural relationships with Byzantium than with Roman Catholic Europe. In the 13th century, the Mongols overtook this region, so it developed even more separately from the rest of Europe. (See Topic 2.2.)

The Mongols required local nobles to collect taxes for them. As these nobles grew wealthy in their role, they began to resist Mongol rule. In the late 15th century, under the leadership of a Moscow-based ruler known as Ivan the Great, the region became independent of the Mongols. This marked the beginning of the modern state of Russia.