The Formation of Western Europe, 800–1500

Previewing Themes

**RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS** In Western Europe the time period from 800 to 1500 is known as the Age of Faith. Christian beliefs inspired the Crusades and the building of great cathedrals, and guided the development of universities.

**Geography** In which political unit was the capital of Christianity, Rome, located?

**ECONOMICS** Medieval Europeans developed new methods of trade and new systems of finance and commerce. The changes are known as the Commercial Revolution.

**Geography** Through which political units would a trader pass if he left from Venice and went to Calais using a land route?

**CULTURAL INTERACTION** Although destructive in many ways, the Crusades resulted in a great deal of cultural exchange. Medieval Christian Europe learned and adopted much from the Muslim world.

**Geography** A stopping place for Crusaders on their way to the Holy Land was the city of Constantinople. In what political unit is Constantinople located?
What are the dangers and rewards of going on a Crusade?

You are a squire in England. The knight you serve has decided to join a Christian Crusade (a holy war) to capture the city of Jerusalem from the Muslims. He has given you the choice of joining or staying home to look after his family and manor. On an earlier Crusade, the knight and his friends looted towns and manors, taking jewels and precious objects. But some of the knights were also held for ransom, robbed, and murdered. You are torn between the desire for adventure and possible riches that you might find on the Crusade, and fear of the hazards that await you on such a dangerous journey.

EXAMINING the ISSUES

• What reasons might an individual have to join a Crusade?
• What might be the advantages and disadvantages of staying home to defend the knight’s family and estate?

As a class, discuss these questions. In your discussion, remember what you’ve learned about the power of religious beliefs to move people to action. As you read about the Crusades in this chapter, see how events turned out for the Crusaders.
SETTING THE STAGE  Some historians have called the period in Western Europe between 500 and 1000 a “dark age.” Magyars seeking plunder pushed up from the Danube River region. Vikings raided western European church monasteries. These groups destroyed many of these centers of learning. Around the 900s, however, a new spirit invaded the church and brought about a spiritual revival in the clergy. Filled with new energy, the church began restructuring itself and started massive building programs to create new places of worship.

The Age of Faith

Monasteries led the spiritual revival. The monastery founded at Cluny in France in 910 was especially important. The reformers there wanted to return to the basic principles of the Christian religion. To do so, they established new religious orders. Influenced by the religious devotion and reverence for God shown by the new monasteries, the popes began to reform the Church. They restored and expanded its power and authority. A new age of religious feeling was born—the Age of Faith. Still, many problems troubled the Church.

Problems in the Church Some priests were nearly illiterate and could barely read their prayers. Some of the popes were men of questionable morals. Many bishops and abbots cared more about their positions as feudal lords than about their duties as spiritual leaders. Reformers were most distressed by three main issues.

- Many village priests married and had families. Such marriages were against Church rulings.
- Bishops sold positions in the Church, a practice called simony (SY•muh•nee).
- Using the practice of lay investiture, kings appointed church bishops.

Church reformers believed the Church alone should appoint bishops.

Reform and Church Organization Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII enforced Church laws against simony and the marriage of priests. The popes who followed Leo and Gregory reorganized the Church to continue the policy of reform. In the 1100s and 1200s, the Church was restructured to resemble a kingdom, with the pope at its head. The pope’s group of advisers was called the papal Curia. The Curia also acted as a court. It developed canon law (the law of the Church) on matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. The Curia also decided cases based
on these laws. Diplomats for the pope traveled through Europe dealing with bishops and kings. In this way the popes established their authority throughout Europe.

The Church collected taxes in the form of tithes. These consumed one-tenth the yearly income from every Christian family. The Church used some of the money to perform social services such as caring for the sick and the poor. In fact, the Church operated most hospitals in medieval Europe.

**New Religious Orders** In the early 1200s, wandering friars traveled from place to place preaching and spreading the Church’s ideas. Like monks, friars took vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Unlike monks, friars did not live apart from the world in monasteries. Instead, they preached to the poor throughout Europe’s towns and cities. Friars owned nothing and lived by begging.

Dominic, a Spanish priest, founded the Dominicans, one of the earliest orders of friars. Because Dominic emphasized the importance of study, many Dominicans were scholars. Francis of Assisi (uh•SEE•zee), an Italian, founded another order of friars, the Franciscans. Francis treated all creatures, including animals, as if they were his spiritual brothers and sisters.

Women played an important role in the spiritual revival. Women joined the Dominicans, Benedictines, and Franciscans. In 1212, a woman named Clare and her friend Francis of Assisi founded the Franciscan order for women. It was known as the Poor Clares. In Germany, Hildegard of Bingen, a mystic and musician, founded a Benedictine convent in 1147. Like friars, these women lived in poverty and worked to help the poor and sick. Unlike the friars, however, women were not allowed to travel from place to place as preachers.

**Cathedrals—Cities of God**

During the medieval period most people worshiped in small churches near their homes. Larger churches called cathedrals were built in city areas. The cathedral was viewed as the representation of the City of God. As such, it was decorated with all the richness that Christians could offer. Between about 800 and 1100, churches were built in the Romanesque (ROH•muh•NEHSK) style. The churches had round arches and a heavy roof held up by thick walls and pillars. The thick walls had tiny windows that let in little light.

**A New Style of Church Architecture** A new spirit in the church and access to more money from the growing wealth of towns and from trade helped fuel the building of churches in several European countries. In the early 1100s, a new style of architecture, known as Gothic, evolved throughout medieval Europe. The term Gothic comes from a Germanic tribe named the Goths. Unlike the heavy, gloomy Romanesque buildings, Gothic cathedrals thrust upward as if reaching toward heaven. Light streamed in through huge stained glass windows. Other arts of the medieval world were evident around or in the Gothic cathedral—sculpture, woodcarvings, and stained glass windows. All of these elements were meant to inspire the worshiper with the magnificence of God. See the diagram on the next page to learn more about Gothic cathedrals.

Soon Gothic cathedrals were built in many towns of France. In Paris, the vaulted ceiling of the Cathedral of Notre Dame (NOH•truh-DAHM) eventually rose to more than 100 feet. Then Chartres, Reims, Amiens, and Beauvais built even taller cathedrals. In all, nearly 500 Gothic churches were built between 1170 and 1270.
Gothic Architecture

The master builders in France, where the Gothic style originated, developed techniques of structural engineering that were key to Gothic architecture: ① ribbed vaults that supported the roof’s weight, ② flying buttresses that transferred weight to thick, exterior walls, ③ pointed arches that framed huge stained glass windows, and ④ tall spires that seemed to be pointing to heaven.

Chartres Cathedral

The cathedral of Chartres (shahrt) is a masterpiece of Gothic architecture. The cathedral has hundreds of sculptures. The stone carvings that frame every door illustrate Bible stories. In this photograph, you can see the cathedral has not one, but two bell towers.

Stained Glass

In addition to its sculpture and soaring towers, Chartres Cathedral has some of the most beautiful stained glass windows of any Gothic cathedral in Europe. The windows illustrate stories from the Bible. As illiterate peasants walked past the 176 windows, they could view those stories. The window above depicts the parable of the Good Samaritan.

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Visual Sources

1. Drawing Conclusions Pose and answer three questions about elements in the style of Gothic architecture that might affect the sense of height and light inside.

2. Comparing and Contrasting Think about stained glass windows you have seen. Do they tell a story? What figures or events do they illustrate?
The Crusades

The Age of Faith also inspired wars of conquest. In 1093, the Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus sent an appeal to Robert, Count of Flanders. The emperor asked for help against the Muslim Turks. They were threatening to conquer his capital, Constantinople:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

Come then, with all your people and give battle with all your strength, so that all this treasure shall not fall into the hands of the Turks. . . . Therefore act while there is still time lest the kingdom of the Christians shall vanish from your sight and, what is more important, the Holy Sepulchre [the tomb where Jesus was buried] shall vanish. And in your coming you will find your reward in heaven, and if you do not come, God will condemn you.

**EMPEROR ALEXIUS COMNENUS**, quoted in *The Dream and the Tomb* by Robert Payne

Pope Urban II also read that letter. Shortly after this appeal, he issued a call for what he termed a “holy war,” a **Crusade**, to gain control of the Holy Land. Over the next 300 years, a number of such Crusades were launched.

**Goals of the Crusades** The Crusades had economic, social, and political goals as well as religious motives. Muslims controlled Palestine (the Holy Land) and threatened Constantinople. The Byzantine emperor in Constantinople appealed to Christians to stop Muslim attacks. In addition, the pope wanted to reclaim Palestine and reunite Christendom, which had split into Eastern and Western branches in 1054.

In addition, kings and the Church both saw the Crusades as an opportunity to get rid of quarrelsome knights who fought each other. These knights threatened the peace of the kingdoms, as well as Church property.

Others who participated in the Crusades were younger sons who, unlike eldest sons, did not stand to inherit their father’s property. They were looking for land and a position in society, or for adventure.

In the later Crusades, merchants profited by making cash loans to finance the journey. They also leased their ships for a hefty fee to transport armies over the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, the merchants of Pisa, Genoa, and Venice hoped to win control of key trade routes to India, Southeast Asia, and China from Muslim traders.

**The First and Second Crusades** Pope Urban’s call brought a tremendous outpouring of religious feeling and support for the Crusade. According to the pope, those who died on Crusade were assured of a place in heaven. With red crosses sewn on tunics worn over their armor and the battle cry of “God wills it!” on their lips, knights and commoners were fired by religious zeal and became Crusaders.

By early 1097, three armies of knights and people of all classes had gathered outside Constantinople. Most of the Crusaders were French, but Bohemians, Germans, Englishmen, Scots, Italians, and Spaniards came as well. The Crusaders were ill-prepared for war in this First Crusade. Many knew nothing of the geography, climate, or culture of the Holy Land. They had no grand strategy to capture Jerusalem. The nobles argued among themselves and couldn’t agree on a leader. Finally an army of 12,000 (less than one-fourth of the original army) approached Jerusalem. The Crusaders besieged the city for over a month. On July-15, 1099, they captured the city.
All in all, the Crusaders had won a narrow strip of land. It stretched about 650 miles from Edessa in the north to Jerusalem in the south. Four feudal Crusader states were carved out of this territory, each ruled by a European noble. The Crusaders’ states were extremely vulnerable to Muslim counterattack. In 1144, Edessa was reconquered by the Turks. The Second Crusade was organized to recapture the city. But its armies straggled home in defeat. In 1187, Europeans were shocked to learn that Jerusalem itself had fallen to a Kurdish warrior and Muslim leader Saladin (SAL•uh•dihn).

The Third Crusade
The Third Crusade to recapture Jerusalem was led by three of Europe’s most powerful monarchs. They were Philip II (Augustus) of France, German emperor Frederick I (Barbarossa), and the English king, Richard the Lion-Hearted. Philip argued with Richard and went home. Barbarossa drowned on the journey. So, Richard was left to lead the Crusaders in an attempt to regain the Holy Land from Saladin. Both Richard and Saladin were brilliant warriors. After many battles, the two agreed to a truce in 1192. Jerusalem remained under Muslim control. In return, Saladin promised that unarmed Christian pilgrims could freely visit the city’s holy places.

The Crusading Spirit Dwindles
In 1204, the Fourth Crusade to capture Jerusalem failed. The knights did not reach the Holy Land. Instead, they ended up looting the city of Constantinople. In the 1200s, four more Crusades to free the holy land were also unsuccessful. The religious spirit of the First Crusade faded, and the search for personal gain grew. In two later Crusades, armies marched not to the Holy Land but to Egypt. The Crusaders intended to weaken Muslim forces there before going to the Holy Land. But none of these attempts conquered much land.
Richard the Lion-Hearted  
1157–1199

Richard was noted for his good looks, charm, courage, grace—and ruthlessness. When he heard that Jerusalem had fallen to the Muslims, he was filled with religious zeal. He joined the Third Crusade, leaving others to rule England in his place.

Richard mounted a siege on the city of Acre. Saladin’s army was in the hills overlooking the city, but it was not strong enough to defeat the Crusaders. When finally the city fell, Richard had the Muslim survivors—some 3,000 men, women, and children—slaughtered. The Muslim army watched helplessly from the hills.

Saladin  
1138–1193

Saladin was the most famous Muslim leader of the 1100s. His own people considered him a most devout man. Even the Christians regarded him as honest and brave.

He wished to chase the Crusaders back into their own territories. He said: *I think that when God grants me victory over the rest of Palestine, I shall divide my territories, make a will stating my wishes, then set sail on this sea for their far-off lands and pursue the Franks there, so as to free the earth from anyone who does not believe in Allah, or die in the attempt.*

The Children’s Crusade  
The Children’s Crusade took place in 1212. In two different movements, thousands of children set out to conquer Jerusalem. One group in France was led by 12-year-old Stephen of Cloyes. An estimated 30,000 children under 18 joined him. They were armed only with the belief that God would give them Jerusalem. On their march south to the Mediterranean, many died from cold and starvation. The rest drowned at sea or were sold into slavery.

In Germany, Nicholas of Cologne gathered about 20,000 children and young adults. They began marching toward Rome. Thousands died in the cold and treacherous crossing of the Alps. Those who survived the trip to Italy finally did meet the pope. He told them to go home and wait until they were older. About 2,000 survived the return trip to Germany. A few boarded a ship for the Holy Land and were never heard of again.

A Spanish Crusade  
In Spain, Muslims (called Moors) controlled most of the country until the 1100s. The *Reconquista* (reh-kawn-KEES-tah) was a long effort by the Spanish to drive the Muslims out of Spain. By the late 1400s, the Muslims held only the tiny kingdom of Granada. In 1492, Granada finally fell to the Christian army of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Spanish monarchs.

To unify their country under Christianity and to increase their power, Isabella and Ferdinand made use of the *Inquisition*. This was a court held by the Church to suppress heresy. Heretics were people whose religious beliefs differed from the teachings of the Church. Many Jews and Muslims in Spain converted to Christianity during the late 1400s. Even so, the inquisitors suspected these Jewish and Muslim converts of heresy. A person suspected of heresy might be questioned for weeks and even tortured. Once suspects confessed, they were often burned at the stake. In 1492,
the monarchs expelled all practicing Jews and Muslims from Spain.

**The Effects of the Crusades**

The Crusades are a forceful example of the power of the Church during the medieval period. The call to go to the Holy Land encouraged thousands to leave their homes and travel to faraway lands. For those who stayed home, especially women, it meant a chance to manage affairs on the estates or to operate shops and inns.

European merchants who lived and traded in the Crusader states expanded trade between Europe and Southwest Asia. The goods imported from Southwest Asia included spices, fruits, and cloth. This trade with the West benefited both Christians and Muslims.

However, the failure of later Crusades also lessened the power of the pope. The Crusades weakened the feudal nobility and increased the power of kings. Thousands of knights and other participants lost their lives and fortunes. The fall of Constantinople weakened the Byzantine Empire.

For Muslims, the intolerance and prejudice displayed by Christians in the Holy Land left behind a legacy of bitterness and hatred. This legacy continues to the present. For Christians and Jews who remained in the Muslim controlled region after the fall of the Crusader states, relations with the Muslim leadership worsened. For Jews in Europe, the Crusades were a time of increased persecution.

The Crusades grew out of religious fervor, feudalism, and chivalry, which came together with explosive energy. This same energy led to the growth of trade, towns, and universities in medieval Europe.

**TERMS & NAMES**

1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- simony
- Gothic
- Urban II
- Crusade
- Saladin
- Richard the Lion-Hearted
- Reconquista
- Inquisition

**USING YOUR NOTES**

2. Which of the events of the Age of Faith do you think was most important to the Church? Explain.

**MAIN IDEAS**

3. What were three main causes of the need to reform the Church?
4. Which Crusade was the only successful one?
5. How did the goals of the Crusades change over the years?

**CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING**

6. **FORMING AND SUPPORTING OPINIONS** Which of the following do you think best represents the spirit of the Age of Faith—Church reform, the Crusades, or the Gothic cathedrals? Explain.
7. **MAKING INFERENCES** What evidence supports the idea that the Church functioned like a kingdom?
8. **RECOGNIZING EFFECTS** How did the Crusades change the history of Europe? Give reasons for your answer.
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **CULTURAL INTERACTION** Write a script about an encounter between a Crusader and a Muslim defender of Jerusalem.

**MULTIMEDIA ACTIVITY | PREPARING A MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION**

Review the information on page 381. Use the Internet to research the Washington National Cathedral. Prepare a multimedia presentation showing the Gothic characteristics of the Washington National Cathedral.

**INTERNET KEYWORD**

Washington National Cathedral
The Crusades

In the Crusades, both Christians and Muslims believed that God was on their side. They both felt justified in using violence to win or to keep the Holy Land. The following excerpts show their belief in the rightness of their deeds.

**A PRIMARY SOURCE**

**Pope Urban II**

In 1095, Pope Urban II issued a plea that resulted in the First Crusade. The pope assured his listeners that God was on their side.

Let the holy sepulcher of our Lord and Saviour, which is possessed by the unclean nations, especially arouse you. . . . This royal city [Jerusalem], situated at the center of the earth, is now held captive by the enemies of Christ and is subjected, by those who do not know God, to the worship of the heathen. Accordingly, undertake this journey eagerly for the remission of your sins, with the assurance of the reward of imperishable glory in the kingdom of heaven.

**B PRIMARY SOURCE**

**William of Tyre**

A Christian bishop, William of Tyre, drew upon eyewitness accounts of the capture of Jerusalem by Crusaders.

It was impossible to look upon the vast numbers of the slain without horror; everywhere lay fragments of human bodies, and the very ground was covered with the blood of the slain. It was not alone the spectacle of headless bodies and mutilated limbs strewn in all directions that roused horror in all who looked upon them. Still more dreadful was it to gaze upon the victors themselves, dripping with blood from head to foot, an ominous sight which brought terror to all who met them. It is reported that within the Temple enclosure alone about ten thousand infidels perished, in addition to those who lay slain everywhere throughout the city in the streets and squares, the number of whom was estimated as no less.

**C PRIMARY SOURCE**

**Saladin**

This is an excerpt of Saladin’s reply to a letter from Frederick I (Barbarossa) threatening Saladin. Saladin wrote the letter after he recaptured Jerusalem.

Whenever your armies are assembled . . . we will meet you in the power of God. We will not be satisfied with the land on the seacoast, but we will cross over with God’s good pleasure and take from you all your lands in the strength of the Lord. . . . And when the Lord, by His power, shall have given us victory over you, nothing will remain for us to do but freely to take your lands by His power and with His good pleasure. . . . By the virtue and power of God we have taken possession of Jerusalem and its territories; and of the three cities that still remain in the hands of the Christians . . . we shall occupy them also.

**D PRIMARY SOURCE**

**Luttrell Psalter**

The illustration below from a Latin text shows Richard the Lion-Hearted (left) unhorsing Saladin during the Third Crusade. However, the two men never actually met in personal combat.
Changes in Medieval Society

MAIN IDEA
ECONOMICS The feudal system declined as agriculture, trade, finance, towns, and universities developed.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW
The changes in the Middle Ages laid the foundations for modern Europe.

TERMS & NAMES
- three-field system
- guild
- Commercial Revolution
- burgher
- vernacular
- Thomas Aquinas
- scholastics

SETTING THE STAGE
While Church reform, cathedral building, and the Crusades were taking place, other important changes were occurring in medieval society. Between 1000 and 1300, agriculture, trade, and finance made significant advances. Towns and cities grew. This was in part due to the growing population and to territorial expansion of western Europe. Cultural interaction with the Muslim and Byzantine worlds sparked the growth of learning and the birth of an institution new to Europe—the university.

A Growing Food Supply
Europe’s great revival would have been impossible without better ways of farming. Expanding civilization required an increased food supply. A warmer climate, which lasted from about 800 to 1200, brought improved farm production. Farmers began to cultivate lands in regions once too cold to grow crops. They also developed new methods to take advantage of more available land.

Switch to Horsepower
For hundreds of years, peasants had depended on oxen to pull their plows. Oxen lived on the poorest straw and stubble, so they were easy to keep. Horses needed better food, but a team of horses could plow three times as much land in a day as a team of oxen.

Before farmers could use horses, however, a better harness was needed. Sometime before 900, farmers in Europe began using a harness that fitted across the horse’s chest, enabling it to pull a plow. As a result, horses gradually replaced oxen for plowing and for pulling wagons. All over Europe, axes rang as the great forests were cleared for new fields.

The Three-Field System
Around A.D. 800, some villages began to organize their lands into three fields instead of two. Two of the fields were planted and the other lay fallow (resting) for a year. Under this new three-field system, farmers could grow crops on two-thirds of their land each year, not just on half of it. As a result, food production increased. Villagers had more to eat. Well-fed people, especially children, could better resist disease and live longer, and as a result the European population grew dramatically.
**The Guilds**

A second change in the European economy was the development of the guild. A *guild* was an organization of individuals in the same business or occupation working to improve the economic and social conditions of its members. The first guilds were merchant guilds. Merchants banded together to control the number of goods being traded and to keep prices up. They also provided security in trading and reduced losses.

About the same time, skilled artisans, such as wheelwrights, glassmakers, winemakers, tailors, and druggists, began craft guilds. In most crafts, both husband and wife worked at the family trade. In a few crafts, especially for cloth making, women formed the majority. The guilds set standards for quality of work, wages, and working conditions. For example, bakers were required to sell loaves of bread of a standard size and weight. The guilds also created plans for supervised training of new workers.

By the 1000s, artisans and craftspeople were manufacturing goods by hand for local and long-distance trade. More and better products were now available to buyers in small towns, in bigger cities, and at trade fairs. Guilds became powerful forces in the medieval economy. The wealth they accumulated helped them establish influence over the government and the economy of towns and cities.

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**History in Depth**

**Craft Guilds**

Craft guilds formed an important part of town life during the medieval period. They trained young people in a skilled job, regulated the quality of goods sold, and were major forces in community life.

**Apprentice**
- Parents paid for training
- Lived with a master and his family
- Required to obey the master
- Trained 2–7 years
- Was not allowed to marry during training
- When trained progressed to journeyman

**Journeyman**
- Worked for a master to earn a salary
- Worked 6 days a week
- Needed to produce a masterpiece (his finest work) to become a master
- Had to be accepted by the guild to become a master

**Master**
- Owned his own shop
- Worked with other masters to protect their trade
- Sometimes served in civic government

**Guild Services**

To members:
- Set working conditions
- Covered members with a type of health insurance
- Provided funeral expenses
- Provided dowries for poor girls

To the community:
- Built almshouses for victims of misfortune
- Guaranteed quality work
- Took turns policing the streets
- Donated windows to the Church

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**Surnames**

Many people can trace their last names, or surnames, back to a medieval occupation in Europe. The name Smith, for example, refers to someone who “smites,” or works, metal. The surname Silversmith would belong to a person who works silver. In German-speaking areas, a smith was named Schmidt.

Someone who made goods out of wood was often surnamed Carpenter. In French-speaking areas, a carpenter was called Charpentier, while in German areas, the same person would be called Zimmerman.

The last name of Boulanger indicated a baker in France. A baker in Germany often had the surname Becker.
Commercial Revolution

Just as agriculture was expanding and craftsmanship changing, so were trade and finance. Increased availability of trade goods and new ways of doing business changed life in Europe. Taken together, this expansion of trade and business is called the Commercial Revolution.

Fairs and Trade  Most trade took place in towns. Peasants from nearby manors traveled to town on fair days, hauling items to trade. Great fairs were held several times a year, usually during religious festivals, when many people would be in town. People visited the stalls set up by merchants from all parts of Europe.

Cloth was the most common trade item. Other items included bacon, salt, honey, cheese, wine, leather, dyes, knives, and ropes. Such local markets met all the needs of daily life for a small community. No longer was everything produced on a self-sufficient manor.

More goods from foreign lands became available. Trade routes spread across Europe from Flanders to Italy. Italian merchant ships traveled the Mediterranean to ports in Byzantium such as Constantinople. They also traveled to Muslim ports along the North African coast. Trade routes were opened to Asia, in part by the Crusades.

Increased business at markets and fairs made merchants willing to take chances on buying merchandise that they could sell at a profit. Merchants then reinvested the profits in more goods.

Business and Banking  As traders moved from fair to fair, they needed large amounts of cash or credit and ways to exchange many types of currencies. Enterprising merchants found ways to solve these problems. For example, bills of exchange established exchange rates between different coinage systems. Letters of credit between merchants eliminated the need to carry large amounts of cash and made trading easier. Trading firms and associations formed to offer these services to their groups.
The Commercial Revolution

Increased Trade

More workers needed → Serfs move to town; workers paid for labor

More cash, banking, and lending services available → More money available for building businesses

Merchants’ wealth and power expand → Merchants’ taxes increase the king’s power and wealth

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Graphics
1. Drawing Conclusions How did increased trade increase the power of the king?
2. Making Inferences Why would workers now have to be paid?

Merchants looked for new markets and opportunities to make a profit. Merchants first had to purchase goods from distant places. To do so they had to borrow money, but the Church forbade Christians from lending money at interest, a sin called usury. Over time, the Church relaxed its rule on usury and Christians entered the banking business. Banking became an important business, especially in Italy.

Society Changes
The changes brought about by the Commercial Revolution were slow, yet they had a major effect on the lives of Europeans. As you can see in the diagram shown above, increased trade brought many changes to aspects of society. Two of the most important changes involved what people did to earn a living and where they lived. As towns attracted workers, the towns grew into cities. Life in the cities was different from life in the sleepy villages or on manors.

Urban Life Flourishes
Scholars estimate that between 1000 and 1150, the population of western Europe rose from around 30 million to about 42 million. Towns grew and flourished. Compared to great cities like Constantinople, European towns were unsophisticated and tiny. Europe’s largest city, Paris, probably had no more than 60,000 people by the year 1200. A typical town in medieval Europe had only about 1,500 to 2,500 people. Even so, these small communities became a powerful force for change in Europe.

Trade and Towns Grow Together
By the later Middle Ages, trade was the very lifeblood of the new towns, which sprang up at ports and crossroads, on hilltops, and along rivers. As trade grew, towns all over Europe swelled with people. The excitement and bustle of towns drew many people. But there were some drawbacks to living in a medieval town. Streets were narrow, filled with animals and their waste. With no sewers, most people dumped household and human waste into the
street in front of the house. Most people never bathed, and their houses lacked fresh air, light, and clean water. Because houses were built of wood with thatched roofs, they were a constant fire hazard. Nonetheless, many people chose to move to towns to pursue the economic and social opportunities they offered.

People were no longer content with their old feudal existence on manors or in tiny villages. Even though legally bound to their lord’s manor, many serfs ran away. According to custom, a serf could now become free by living within a town for a year and a day. A saying of the time went, “Town air makes you free.” Many of these runaway serfs, now free people, made better lives for themselves in towns.

**Merchant Class Shifts the Social Order** The merchants and craftspeople of medieval towns did not fit into the traditional medieval social order of noble, clergy, and peasant. At first, towns came under the authority of feudal lords, who used their authority to levy fees, taxes, and rents. As trade expanded, the **burghers**, or merchant-class town dwellers, resented this interference in their trade and commerce. They organized themselves and demanded privileges. These included freedom from certain kinds of tolls and the right to govern the town. At times they fought against their landlords and won these rights by force.

**The Revival of Learning**

During the Crusades, European contact with Muslims and Byzantines greatly expanded. This contact brought a new interest in learning, especially in the works of Greek philosophers. The Muslim and Byzantine libraries housed copies of these writings. Most had disappeared during the centuries following the fall of Rome and the invasions of western Europe.

**The Muslim Connection** In the 1100s, Christian scholars from Europe began visiting Muslim libraries in Spain. Few Western scholars knew Greek but most did know Latin. So Jewish scholars living in Spain translated the Arabic versions of works by Aristotle and other Greek writers into Latin. All at once, Europeans acquired a huge new body of knowledge. This included science, philosophy, law, mathematics, and other fields. In addition, the Crusaders brought back to Europe superior Muslim technology in ships, navigation, and weapons.

**Scholars and the University** At the center of the growth of learning stood a new European institution—the university. The word *university* originally referred to a group of scholars meeting wherever they could. People, not buildings, made up the medieval university. Universities arose at Paris and at Bologna, Italy, by the end of the 1100s. Others followed at the English town of Oxford and at Salerno, Italy. Most students were the sons of burghers or well-to-do artisans. For most students, the goal was a job in government or the Church. Earning a bachelor’s degree in theology might take five to seven years in school; becoming a master of theology took at least 12 years of study.

New ideas and forms of expression began to flow out of the universities. At a time when serious scholars and writers were writing in Latin, a few remarkable poets began using a lively **vernacular**, or the everyday language of their homeland. Some of these writers wrote masterpieces that are still
read today. Dante Alighieri wrote *The Divine Comedy* (1308–1314) in Italian. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* (about 1386–1400) in English. Christine de Pisan wrote *The Book of The City of Ladies* (1405) in French. Since most people couldn’t read or understand Latin, these works written in the vernacular brought literature to many people.

**Aquinas and Medieval Philosophy** Christian scholars were excited by the ideas of Greek philosophers. They wondered if a Christian scholar could use Aristotle’s logical approach to truth and still keep faith with the Bible.

In the mid-1200s, the scholar Thomas *Aquinas* (uh-KY-nuhs) argued that the most basic religious truths could be proved by logical argument. Between 1267 and 1273, Aquinas wrote the *Summa Theologicae*.

Aquinas’s great work, influenced by Aristotle, combined ancient Greek thought with the Christian thought of his time. Aquinas and his fellow scholars who met at the great universities were known as schoolmen, or *scholastics*. The scholastics used their knowledge of Aristotle to debate many issues of their time. Their teachings on law and government influenced the thinking of western Europeans, particularly the English and French. Accordingly, they began to develop democratic institutions and traditions.

**TERMS & NAMES**

1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.
   - three-field system
   - guild
   - Commercial Revolution
   - burgher
   - vernacular
   - Thomas Aquinas
   - scholastics

**USING YOUR NOTES**

2. How did medieval society change between 1000 and 1500?

**MAIN IDEAS**

3. How did guilds influence business practices in medieval towns?

4. How were Muslim scholars linked to the revival of learning in Europe?

5. In what ways did burghers expand their freedom from landlords?

**CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING**

6. **RECOGNIZING EFFECTS** What was the effect of the development of towns on the feudal system?

7. **ANALYZING MOTIVES** Why would writers choose to produce works in the vernacular instead of in Latin?

8. **RECOGNIZING EFFECTS** How did the Commercial Revolution lay the foundation for the economy of modern Europe?

9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** [ECONOMICS] Write a brief news article on the value of letters of credit and how they have changed commercial trade activities.

**CONNECT TO TODAY**

**WRITING AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORT**

Contact a local bank and find out what services are available to its commercial clients.

Write a brief report on the banking services. Identify which services seem to have had their beginnings in the late medieval period and which ones are modern.