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The Medieval World

Course Guidebook

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

The Medieval World

Scope:

Welcome to *The Medieval World*, a course that aims to explore as fully as possible the many facets of the period of history we have come to call the Middle Ages. Over the next 36 lectures, we will explore medieval social and cultural institutions and the historical events that shaped this incredibly important period in human history. Although 36 lectures may sound like ample time to cover what is exciting and interesting about the medieval world, the Middle Ages was such a complex and varied period that we will, in some cases, barely scratch the surface. I mention this because any study of the medieval world has to begin with an understanding of how multifaceted this period is; any such study must recognize the diverse range of cultures, institutions, and belief systems that are encompassed under the single descriptor "medieval."

For the sake of convenience, most scholars define the medieval period as lasting roughly 1,000 years, from 500 to 1500, and being geographically located in the place we generally refer to as Western Europe. As one might suppose when considering the number of societies and eras included under the rubric "medieval," the Middle Ages should not properly be thought of as a single period in time with a uniform cultural consciousness. Certainly Britain in the year 700 and Italy in the year 1350 were vastly different in terms of language, social structure, literature, government, trading activities, and more. Perhaps even more significantly, if we compare two Western European medieval societies that existed at the same time—such as Spain and France in the year 900—so, too, we will find the differences more striking than the similarities.

As different as the various communities of the Middle Ages were in relationship to one another, the difference between then and now is in many ways far greater. Still, there are many similarities to be found—both among medieval societies themselves and between the Middle Ages and our own period. The medieval world—strange and foreign as it may seem at first

to those of us living in the 21st century—is a world that is on its way to becoming our own. So much of what we consider key aspects of our modern ideas of religion, government, science, technology, and social structure can be traced directly to origins in the medieval world.

This course is slightly different in focus from other courses on the Middle Ages. Very often, the study of the medieval period presents a daunting challenge because it seems that there are so many wars and kings and plagues to keep track of. Of necessity, this course will spend considerable time on the major historical events and people who shaped this period, but at the same time it aims to bring the medieval world to life. What was daily life like for a peasant in the 14th century? What did medieval people eat? What kind of houses did they live in? What did they wear? What did they do for entertainment? What kind of literature did they like? To explore these questions and others, the course will be structured in two ways. We will move through the period roughly sequentially, but from time to time a lecture will be more thematic in nature, allowing us to explore in depth certain ideas or events we could not fully understand by moving through them chronologically.

Likewise, we will also seek to situate the medieval world in a broader geographical, social, and temporal context. We will spend time exploring how the late antique period—the time of the Roman Empire—transformed into what we now call the Middle Ages and how the Middle Ages itself developed into what we think of as the modern period. Likewise, we will spend considerable time beyond the borders of Western Europe, exploring how interactions with different cultures and religions—Eastern Europe, the Byzantine Empire, the Middle East, Islam, and Asia—profoundly influenced and shaped the medieval world. Approaching the study of the Middle Ages from multiple perspectives—shifting from a chronological approach to a thematic approach, from a broad overview to a specific case study, from a Christian to a Muslim perspective—helps us to better understand this fascinating period and its many unique characteristics and nuances. ■

The Medieval World

Lecture 1

The Middle Ages is such a complex and varied period. … Any study of the medieval world has to begin with an understanding of how multifaceted this period is and needs also to recognize the diverse range of cultures, institutions, and belief systems that are encompassed under the descriptor "medieval."

To those living in Europe in what we now call the Middle Ages, the period was not in the middle of anything; in fact, many thought they were living in the last days of the world. In one respect this was true: With the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, European social and cultural institutions underwent dramatic shifts. Yet, although many people believe that the Middle Ages was one long dark age, nothing could be further from the truth. The medieval world was a rich and varied place,

Far from being a "dark age," the Middle Ages gave birth to the great universities of Europe.

encompassing a vast diversity of peoples, cultures, languages, and traditions; so to explore it, we must first try to define it.

More for convenience than anything else, most scholars think of the Middle Ages as lasting roughly 1,000 years—from A.D. 500 to 1500—and as including most of what we think of today as Western Europe. Scholars further divide the medieval period into three subperiods: the early (500–1000), High (1000–1300), and late Middle Ages (1300–1500). Although most scholars agree to these boundaries, ideas and institutions we might call medieval can be identified from well before 500 and lasting well past 1500. Similarly, regions outside Western Europe—particularly the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic world—significantly affected the development of the medieval world.

While it is true that by modern standards the Middle Ages was a trying time in which to live, it also brimmed with life.

While it is true that by modern standards the Middle Ages was a trying time in which to live, it also brimmed with life and was marked by exciting social, political, artistic, and scientific developments that have profoundly affected modern society. The university system has its origins in this period, when students hungry for knowledge would gather around a renowned scholar to learn from him. Some of the greatest works of world literature were composed in the Middle Ages, including *Beowulf*, *The Canterbury Tales*, Dante's poetry, and stories of King Arthur. Many seemingly modern ideas about legal rights have medieval origins. The Magna Carta, for example, set the stage for later thinking about the limits of a leader's power. Great strides were made in architecture at this time, seen particularly in the construction of breathtaking cathedrals and churches during the High Middle Ages.

For the majority of people living in the medieval world there was only one faith—Christianity—and there was no distinction between secular and religious life. Faith informed politics, national identity, and almost every aspect of daily life, and it was regarded by most people as proper that this should be the case. Still, the roots of ideas such as the separation of church and state and religious dissent such as that seen in the Protestant

Reformation can be found in the Middle Ages. Although Christianity was the dominant religious force in the medieval world, Judaism and Islam both played important roles in shaping these societies, particularly in the areas of economics and the sciences. Medieval Christianity experienced its fullest and most devout expression in the many monastic orders that developed during the Middle Ages and in the practice of pilgrimage. ■

Suggested Reading

Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*.

Linehan and Nelson, *The Medieval World*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways is the adjective "medieval" a useful and accurate descriptor for the period spanning roughly 500–1500 in Western Europe? How does it fall short?

2. What seem to be the most striking differences between medieval culture and modern culture, generally speaking?

The Legacy of the Roman World

Lecture 2

Rome became more than just a geographical locus; Romanization, or the spread of Roman ideas and customs, became important throughout the empire. … The various cultures that sprang from the Roman Empire are viewed by most scholars as interesting hybrids of Roman, Germanic, and Christian elements.

The legacy of the Roman Empire shaped and influenced the early Middle Ages, particularly in terms of the so-called Crisis of the Third Century, the responses of Emperor Diocletian to the crisis, and the significance of the rule of Emperor Constantine. The customs and institutions of Rome gave rise to the many societies of the Middle Ages. To understand how this transformation happened, we need to understand the geographical, political, and cultural nature of the empire.

The empire was astonishingly large, including Europe as far west as Britain and as far north as the Rhine and Danube rivers. It extended into the Middle East, and it included much of North Africa in its embrace. The desire for natural resources—for example, Britain's tin—led to much of the empire's expansion, and the justly famous Roman military, a wonder of order and precision, led that expansion. The idea of *romanitas*—literally, "Romanness"—spread throughout the empire; every major town tried to turn itself into a mini-Rome, mimicking the customs, political system, and buildings found in the capital.

Current scholarship rejects the idea of a single, cataclysmic fall of Rome and tends to see the Roman world transforming, rather than collapsing, into the medieval world. This transformation began long before the so-called end of the Roman era. In the 3rd century, the empire was seriously overextended in terms of both manpower and resources, and it was threatened in four main areas: the military, the political arena, the economy, and social upheaval. Emperor Diocletian, who took the throne in 285, set out to solve these problems by establishing the emperor as a deity; dividing the empire into two administrative areas, each with its own emperor and caesar (the tetrarchy);

and scapegoating (and persecuting) Christians. Emperor Constantine, who came to the throne in 306, helped transform Christianity from the most persecuted to the most favored religion in the empire by issuing the Edict of Toleration, protecting Christians from persecution, in 313.

In the 4th and 5th centuries, the Roman Empire continued to feel pressure on its borders, particularly to the north, beyond which lay Germania and the Visigoths. The Goths had, at various times, served the empire, particularly as paid members of the military. At the end of the 4th century, pressured out of their homeland by the advancing Huns, the Goths requested asylum within the empire but were denied because the Roman economy was too stretched to accommodate them. In 410, they sacked Rome, and their leader, Alaric, was made emperor. Thus began the Germanization of the empire. The devastating effects of the sack of Rome and of Germanization are perhaps seen most clearly in Britain. Abandoned by the empire, it turned to Anglo-Saxon mercenaries for defense against the Picts and Scots, only to be invaded and conquered by those same Anglo-Saxons.

Diocletian's division of the empire into eastern and western halves would have significant repercussions throughout the Middle Ages.

Diocletian's division of the empire into eastern and western halves would have significant repercussions throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. Scholars speak of the "barbarization" (i.e., Germanization) of the West and the "Hellenization" (i.e., Greek influence) of the East. The population of the West stagnated, even fell in some areas; urban centers went into decline; violence increased; trade withered; literacy rates dropped; and centralized power decreased, shifting into the hands of local leaders. ■

Suggested Reading

Linehan and Nelson, *The Medieval World*.

Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did Diocletian's reform pave the way for the Roman society that would eventually transform into the medieval world?

2. Were there any positive effects of the Germanization of the Roman Empire?

The Christianization of Europe

Lecture 3

"Like some new Constantine, he stepped forward to the baptismal pool, ready to wash away the sores of his old leprosy and to be cleansed in flowing water from the sordid stains which he had borne so long. … King Clovis confessed his belief in God the Almighty."

—Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*

Although at its end the Roman Empire was officially Christian, many European communities, especially in so-called Germania, were not. Once the empire dissolved into various small kingdoms, the Christianization of medieval Europe began in earnest. This lecture goes back to the 4th century, when Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire, to explore how it changed after Roman rule ended, focusing in particular on the conversion of various communities. We will pay particular attention to accounts of conversion given in the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and Gregory of Tours's *History of the Franks*, examining the strategies and stumbling blocks of medieval Christian missionaries.

Within 100 years of the Edict of Toleration, Christians had become the most favored religious group within the empire, but the process of Christianization was far from simple or easy. During its persecution, Christianity was seen as a threat to the empire because it was an aggressive, proselytizing religion and its adherents wished to institute reform. Once it became a protected religion, Christianity's success was due in part to its willingness to incorporate pagan traditions and symbols into the new faith, making the transition easier for many pagans.

Two case studies of the conversion process—those of the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons—offer an idea of the realities attendant on bringing pagan peoples into the fold of Christianity in a practical, everyday sense. The group of Franks known as the Merovingians had settled in Gaul (modern-day France) by the 4th century. Their conversion was recorded by a near contemporary,

Gregory of Tours, in his *History of the Franks*. Merovingian King Clovis married Clothild, a Christian from the Burgundian royal family, and she tried to persuade him to convert. Clovis agreed to convert if Christ granted him victory over the Alemanni. This, of course, is what happened. While Gregory takes pains to paint Clovis as a "new Constantine," Gregory likely manipulated the facts to write a providential history, one focused on proving that God is the ultimate source and cause of all things. It seems more likely that Clovis was already a Christian, albeit a heretical one—an Arian.

Like Gregory of Tours, Bede's agenda was promoting Christianity, which makes his inclusion of accounts of early conversions that seem somewhat less than sincere all the more remarkable.

Like the Merovingians, the Anglo-Saxons in Britain were Germanic, linguistically and culturally. With their conquest of Britain in the mid-5th century, they almost entirely wiped out its Romanized and Christian society. The Anglo-Saxon kingdom was one of the last former realms of the empire to remain pagan. In 597, Pope Gregory the Great sent a missionary team, led by Augustine of Canterbury, to convert them. Most of what we know of this process comes from an 8th-century British monk and scholar, the Venerable Bede, who recorded the events in his monumental *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Like Gregory of Tours, Bede's agenda was promoting Christianity, which makes his inclusion of accounts of early conversions that seem somewhat less than sincere all the more remarkable. Bede describes how the majority of the East Saxons converted to Christianity simply because their king, Ethelbert, did so in 604. He also relates how King Edwin of Northumbria was persuaded to convert by his chief pagan priest.

While these conversion narratives reveal much, remember we are seeing evidence from only a small proportion of the upper echelons of society. We have no real idea about the religious practices and beliefs of up to 95 percent of the population. These narratives also serve to caution us about working with contemporary sources, as Gregory and Bede each obviously had an agenda. Objectivity as modern historians think of it was largely unknown in the medieval world. ■

Suggested Reading

Geary, *The Myth of Nations*.

Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do early conversion narratives suggest about the depth and sincerity of religious belief in the early Middle Ages?

2. How did early Christians draw on Roman traditions and ideals to establish and support their new faith?

After the Roman Empire—Hybrid Cultures

Lecture 4

With the Christian missionaries sent from Rome came literacy. Although it seems clear that the Anglo-Saxons had a very rich oral storytelling tradition during the time before their conversion, it is only afterward that much of that lore is set down on parchment—and most likely it was written down by monks, who often seem to wish to put their own Christian interpretation on a poem that may have had no Christian elements in its original oral form.

Many scholars agree that the societies that developed out of the Roman Empire should be considered hybrids of Roman, Christian, and Germanic elements. Literature, art, and architecture in Anglo-Saxon England demonstrate how the values and ideals of these three different cultures were being combined in new and interesting ways. In support of these claims, we can read Old English poems such as "The Wanderer," "The Dream of the Rood," and *Beowulf*; study archaeological treasures found at the Sutton Hoo burial, including the famous Franks Casket; and examine illuminated manuscripts, such as the Lindisfarne Gospels.

The 7th-century artifacts discovered at Sutton Hoo point to a hybrid of Christian and pagan cultures in Anglo-Saxon Britain.

Christianity gained a strong position within the empire in part by accommodating pre-Christian customs and traditions. Administratively, the early church imitated the bureaucratic institutions and hierarchy of the empire, dividing various realms into provinces, dioceses, and parishes. The title of the supreme leader of the

church—*pontifex maximus*, or pope—was the same as that used by the head pagan priest in Rome's pre-Christian days.

The blending of Christian ideals with Roman administrative practices was further underscored at the church council of Nicaea in 325. Significantly, it was headed not by the pope but by the secular ruler of Rome, the Emperor Constantine. Bishop Ambrose of Milan, one of the early church fathers, explicitly described a connection between the kingdom of God and the physical realm of the Roman Empire on Earth, but he also believed that religious authority trumped that of secular leaders.

Bishop Ambrose of Milan, one of the early church fathers, explicitly described a connection between the kingdom of God and the physical realm of the Roman Empire on Earth.

What happened when Christian and Roman ideals came into contact with Germanic culture? Early medieval Britain presents some of the most interesting evidence of cultural hybridization. The Franks Casket, unearthed at the Sutton Hoo archeological dig, depicts a series of scenes from both Christian and pagan traditions. The poetry of Anglo-Saxon England reflects this cultural synthesis, particularly in topic selection and treatment of religious subjects. The only original copy of the pre-Christian poem "The Wanderer" contains a later Christianizing addition, while "The Dream of the Rood" envisions Christ as a heroic (i.e., Germanic) warrior.

Perhaps the most famous literary work from the Anglo-Saxon period showing this cultural fusion—and the unease and disjunction it sometimes created—is *Beowulf*, with its pagan characters and Christian narrator. The illuminated manuscripts from this period also demonstrate in their illustrations a cultural synthesis of Roman, Germanic, and Christian elements. While the earlier texts show a blending of styles with an emphasis on the British, by the 8th century the style is strongly Roman. ■

Suggested Reading

Geary, *The Myth of Nations*.

Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. What specific elements of Roman, Christian, and Germanic cultures seem to have been dominant in the new hybrid cultures to which they gave rise?

2. How useful is it to look to artistic and literary production as a means of understanding a culture as a whole?

Early Monasticism

Lecture 5

Benedict considered obedience to be the most important principle of monastic life. He also did not see the monastery as a retreat away from the world—the monastery was a place where the monks were, in fact, engaged in saving the world through the work of prayer.

This lecture examines one extreme form of pious expression that became fairly popular in the medieval period: monasticism. Most early medieval monastic institutions followed the Rule of Saint Benedict, which divided a monk's day between manual labor and prayer. However, this was not the only type of monasticism popular in the early Middle Ages; the Irish followed a different model, which led to some notable debates between what came to be called the Roman and Celtic churches.

Monasticism would significantly affect the culture of the Middle Ages in myriad ways. It existed in two main forms—eremitic and cenobitic monasticism. "Monastic" comes from the Greek *monos*, meaning "alone," and eremitic ("hermit") monasticism, as practiced by the Desert Fathers, was a true example of solitary living. The second and more familiar type of monasticism is cenobitic ("community") monasticism. A community of men would be known as monks, and they lived in a monastery; women who adopted this way of life were called nuns and lived in a nunnery, or convent.

There were more than a few reasons why people chose to forsake secular life and all the things—marriage, children, and the ability to own property, to name a few—that went with it. The main reason was undoubtedly because of religious faith. Although piety was expected of everyone, the self-sacrifice of monasticism provided a much more rigorous test of faith. At the same time, and somewhat contradictorily, monastic life was attractive to people who, for whatever reason, were denied the possibility of a successful secular life. Although it was possible for peasants to join an order, for the most part the ranks of monks and nuns were drawn from the upper echelons of society. Many were younger sons, widows, and widowers of wealthy families.

The Rule of Saint Benedict served as a guide to all aspects of monastic life. Saint Benedict of Nursia believed quite strongly that all monastic communities should be self-supporting, so manual labor was an important component of his rule. He also felt the monastery should be run like a family, with a father figure, called an abbot, at the head. Thus obedience was a prominent part of the rule. Although in many respects removed from secular life, Benedict viewed the monastery as very much engaged with the world, because one of the main tasks of the monks was to pray for the sins of others.

Although strict in many respects, the prologue and 73 chapters of Benedict's rule show flexibility and the recognition that exceptional situations might occur within the monastery. The rule addresses all practical facets of monastic living, like clothing, sleeping arrangements, and food allotment. Dictates concerning prayer comprise some of the most rigorous and demanding parts of the rule and reveal that medieval monks interrupted work and sleep to attend to this most important labor. The monastic day was divided by prayers called Matins, Laud, Prime, Tierce Sext, Nones, Vespers, Compline, and Nocturne, although the exact number and times of prayers might vary from monastery to monastery. To ensure that all brothers were familiar with the rule, it was also read aloud at various times throughout the year—usually during mealtimes—so that particular strictures and concerns would not be forgotten or neglected. Although Benedict envisioned a simple and somewhat spartan life for his monks, this proved difficult, as many monastic institutions became quite wealthy in spite of themselves through donations.

Although Benedict envisioned a simple and somewhat spartan life for his monks, this proved difficult, as many monastic institutions became quite wealthy in spite of themselves through donations.

Although Benedictine monasticism was the dominant form in the early medieval world, there were other types as well, particularly Irish monasticism, which developed independently of monastic traditions on the continent. Whereas continental monasticism was communal, Irish monasticism was more eremitic, with monks living in clusters of small

individual huts or cells. Whereas Benedictine monasticism was hierarchical and stressed unity of belief among its various houses, Irish monasticism was much more varied and independent and was influenced by local traditions and leaders. The difference between the two Christian traditions came to a head with a fierce debate about the date of Easter. This dispute was settled in favor of the Roman Church at the Synod of Whitby in 664. Until the 12th century and the Cistercian reforms, Benedictine monasticism and Roman Christianity would dominate the religious landscape of the medieval world. ■

Suggested Reading

Jones, *Medieval Lives*.

Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. What types of people was monasticism able to encompass within its embrace? How open was it to people of different classes, ideals, and genders?

2. In what ways did early monasticism adhere to, depart from, or revise/enhance traditional religious practices and beliefs of the Western church?

From Merovingian Gaul to Carolingian France

Lecture 6

Perhaps more than any other culture that rose out of the remains of the Roman Empire, Frankish society managed to preserve the best of what the empire had had in place in terms of government and infrastructure, while also adapting and innovating. … The Franks were the catalysts of Western culture.

In the 8th century, the Merovingian Franks controlled most of what is modern-day France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and parts of Germany. Their culture would serve as a model for European social and political organization for most of the next 1,000 years. Merovingian society was structured along two axes: the comitatus, or band of loyal warriors, and the family. While family was very important in Frankish society, the Merovingians practiced polygamy, coupled with inheritance rules that equally divided wealth among all heirs, which meant that power often quickly dissipated. The comitatus and the family often clashed violently, as the example of King Clovis and his four sons demonstrates.

Radegund's experience helps to illuminate the somewhat contradictory position of women in Germanic society.

The Merovingians sought to conquer the neighboring Thuringians. Examining the details of this episode can help us better understand this society and societies that emerged from it. The Thuringians were a loose confederation of tribes who lived along the Czech border in what is now Germany. In the early 6th century, they broke a truce with the Merovingians when a Thuringian leader murdered several Frankish women and children. In 531, the Merovingians retaliated, all but wiping out the Thuringians. Two Thuringian survivors were six-year-old Princess Radegund and her brother. The Frankish leader Clothar claimed Radegund as one of his wives as a means of cementing his claim to Thuringian territory.

Radegund's experience helps to illuminate the somewhat contradictory position of women in Germanic society. Although critically important as a means of forging peace between peoples (through marriage) and responsible for the running of the household and education of the children, Germanic women were often treated as objects to be traded or exchanged. A poem entitled "The Thuringian War," most likely composed by Radegund herself, points up these contradictory aspects of the life of a woman in this society and suggests a high level of education for its author. In 550, Clothar killed Radegund's brother, which was the last straw for this Frankish queen. She fled to her villa at Saix, which was her own personal property through the Germanic custom of *morgengabe*, or "morning gift," traditionally bestowed on a bride the morning after a marriage was consummated. She browbeat the local bishop into consecrating her as a nun, something that was quite dangerous, given that Clothar was still alive. She took control of the abbey at Poitiers, acting as both abbess and queen, procuring for the abbey several important religious relics.

Pepin the Short, the first Carolingian king of the Franks, secured his throne through military victory and an alliance with the pope.

Around 600, the power of the Merovingians started to wane, and a new dynasty, the Carolingians, rose up to replace them. Because of the practice of dividing property equally among all sons, the Merovingian world was divided into several small kingdoms, none with any significant power. One of the most powerful positions in the Frankish bureaucracy was the office of mayor of the palace, the right-hand man to the Frankish king. Starting in 687, a mayor of the palace named Pepin of Heristal and his son, Charles Martel (known as The Hammer), were able to lead their personal comites to victories over neighboring communities, establishing a significant power base in the Frankish world. Charles Martel cleverly worked with the church, coming to Pope Gregory III's assistance when the papal territories were threatened by the Lombards. In 751, Pope Zacharius declared that whoever exercised the power of a king should also occupy the throne. This led directly to the

deposition of the last Merovingian king and the crowning of Charles's son Pepin the Short. In return for this support, the Pepin ceded the lands that have become known as the Papal States to the church.

This new dynasty of Frankish rulers became known as the Carolingian dynasty, a nod to its greatest ruler, Charles the Great, or more commonly, Charlemagne. Charlemagne was said to cut an impressive figure, standing seven feet tall. An examination of his bones reveals that this is only a slight exaggeration; he seems to have stood 6′7″—truly remarkable in the medieval period. Charlemagne set out to make his mark on the medieval world in four distinct areas: First and foremost, he was a conqueror. Every year, his army was on the move, and he rarely suffered defeat. Secondly, he set in place the apparatus of managing a large state, blending a central cultural idea of Frankishness with a fair degree of local autonomy. He was a huge supporter of the church, commissioning model sermons that could be disseminated throughout the kingdom and instituting the practice of tithing. Finally, he was a patron of the arts. ■

Suggested Reading

Collins, *Charlemagne*.

McKitterick, *Carolingian Culture*.

Questions to Consider

1. What does Radegund's particular situation suggest about the status of women in Merovingian society? How does her position seem to differ (or not) from women in other early medieval communities?

2. Which of Charlemagne's achievements seems most deserving of the fame and reputation he enjoys to this day? Or is it the combination of campaigns and activities that is most significant, as opposed to any single area of achievement?

Charlemagne and the Carolingian Renaissance

Lecture 7

The word "Renaissance" means literally "rebirth," and … when applied to the early modern period seems to suggest that after the long, dark, obscure, and ignorant days of the Middle Ages, there was finally a rediscovery, a rebirth, of the humanistic tradition we so often associate with the Roman Empire. Charlemagne, however, got there first.

A flowering of art, architecture, literature, music, and education occurred under the rule of Charlemagne. By the year 800, Charlemagne's kingdom was the largest realm ruled over by a single individual since the Roman Empire. Charlemagne thus thought it proper to act like an emperor and made significant achievements as a conqueror, state builder, and supporter of the church. But perhaps his most important legacy was in the arts and education. Charlemagne created a vibrant center of scholarship we call the Palace School at Aachen, attracting the greatest minds of the age. One of Charlemagne's major goals was to collect, preserve, and copy the era's most important manuscripts. Today, in many instances, we know of particular texts only because of a copy made at Charlemagne's behest.

In his quest to make these great works accessible to as many as possible, Charlemagne fostered the creation of new, more legible style of writing, known as Carolingian miniscule. Almost all of the important manuscripts of the age were written in Latin, so Charlemagne set up programs to ensure that future generations would be able to read the language. The center of the Carolingian Renaissance was the Palace School at Aachen, a former Roman military camp. Its center was the marble Palatine Chapel, whose columns were imported—in some instances stolen—from Italy. The chapel had three levels: the top, representing the heavens; the bottom, the place of worship; and the middle, where Charlemagne placed his throne, a clear suggestion that he was an intermediary between the people and God. Charlemagne instituted numerous reforms to make the experience of the Mass more pleasant. Perhaps the most famous is the use of Gregorian chant, a singing style attributed to Pope Gregory the Great but popularized by Charlemagne.

While Charlemagne was building his empire, a debate raged between the churches in the former western and eastern halves of the Roman Empire. After the fall of the West, the emperor in Constantinople declared that he was now the de facto emperor, and he and his people were working toward the moment when the empire would be restored and reunited once more. The eastern emperors thus felt that they had authority over the pope, an idea known as caesaropapism. At Christmas in the year 800, Charlemagne attended services in Rome. There, in a move Charlemagne claimed was a surprise, Pope Leo III placed a crown on his head and proclaimed him Holy Roman Emperor. While this move was primarily an end run around any claims of the Byzantine emperor, it gave rise to an at-times vicious debate about secular versus religious authority.

While Charlemagne was building his empire, a debate raged between the churches in the former western and eastern halves of the Roman Empire.

Although at its height Charlemagne's empire was one of the greatest entities the medieval world would see, within 60 years of his death all of its power had dissipated. The idea of a Holy Roman Empire, however, would continue to be a potent one for the next 1,000 years. ■

Suggested Reading

Collins, *Charlemagne*.

McKitterick, *Carolingian Culture*.

Riché, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does Charlemagne's interaction with the Western church reflect or embody medieval concerns about the relationship between secular and religious leaders?

2. What was it about the idea of a Holy Roman Empire that made it such a potent concept in the medieval world? What is the legacy (if any) of this idea today?

Byzantium, Islam, and the West

Lecture 8

What is interesting about Byzantium in the late 5th and 6th centuries is that its emperor and its citizens, for the most part, still considered themselves to be Roman. … Yet … when the Goths sacked Rome itself, there was no help forthcoming from Constantinople. Essentially, the inhabitants of the eastern half of the empire hunkered down and consolidated their power

The societies of the Middle Ages were shaped in important ways by entities beyond the borders of the former Western Empire. The West, the Byzantine Empire, and the Islamic world all affected each other significantly and should be thought of as sibling cultures of Rome. The Byzantine Empire, or the eastern half of the former Roman Empire, is often described as becoming Hellenized in the 5th and 6th centuries, while the West became barbarized. The Byzantine Empire was more stable than the West in part because of its more stable tax base. They also had lower defense costs, a more urban economy (which was less susceptible to vagaries than the West's primarily agricultural system), and a capital ideally situated as a trading center. Emperor Justinian further encouraged growth and stability by issuing a series of law codes, reforming Christianity, and reclaiming portions of the former Roman Empire through military conquest.

Justinian, Roman emperor of the East in the 7th century, commissioned the great church of Hagia Sophia in part as a sign of Rome's, and Christianity's, enduring power.

In the 7th century, however, the Byzantine Empire found its borders under threat by the Persian Empire,

whose attacks resulted in ruralization of the empire and sparked a rise in Christian piety, including an iconoclastic movement. The eastern and western halves of the empire continued to drift further and further apart, which would have significant repercussions later in the medieval period. This movement away from one another was accelerated by the rise of Islam.

Islam had a more profound impact on the former eastern half of the Roman Empire due to the close proximity of the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic world. Islam originated on the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century in a society that was organized primarily by tribal affiliation. Islam has much in common with Christianity and Judaism, all of which spring from a common root culture. The prophet Muhammad received a series of visions from the angel Gabriel in the year 610, which led him to found Islam. The messages from the angel continued throughout his life; when written down, they became the holy book of Islam, called the Qur'an. Muhammad came to power by allying himself with various nomadic leaders and defeating many political leaders from Mecca in battle. In this way he established the *ummah*, the community of the faithful, and the important precedent of blending religion and politics in the Arab world.

[Muhammad] established the *ummah*, the community of the faithful, and the important precedent of blending religion and politics in the Arab world.

In the West, the changes happening in the Byzantine and Islamic worlds would have significant effects, even though some of them would not be felt for many years. In 711, Spain was conquered by North African Muslims and would remain Islamic for more than 300 years, until a Crusade was launched to retake Spain for the Christians. The Arab world became a society of education and scientific advancement. Many ancient texts would be lost to us today had they not been preserved in Arabic copies, and most of the medical and scientific advances of the late medieval world came about due to contact with Arab learning. For all its advances, the Islamic world suffered its own share of difficulties after the death of Muhammad, as various factions claimed the right to lead the *ummah*. Eventually, these groups began to war with one another. ■

Suggested Reading

Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*.

Mango, *The Oxford History of Byzantium*.

Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways did the Byzantine Empire demonstrate a continuity with the ideals of Roman Empire that differed from that found in the world of the medieval West?

2. In what areas was the Muslim world more advanced than that of the European West? How did it contribute to the development of medieval culture?

The Viking Invasions

Lecture 9

Those Scandinavian seafarers who landed at Lindisfarne on June 8, 793, were not interested in books or Christianity. … To them, there was no sacrilege in attacking a religious institution; to them, monasteries were simply large treasure houses that housed a population of men unable or unwilling to properly defend it.

The Vikings began to spread across Europe and beyond in the late 8th century, gaining a fearsome reputation for looting and pillaging. Their expansion was swift, violent, and far-reaching: They made it to Ireland, Italy, Russia, and North America. This lecture examines the impact of their raiding practices on various European societies—particularly the Franks—and discusses the unique aspects of their culture as represented in the Norse Sagas and other accounts.

In June 793, a group of Scandinavian raiders attacked the monastery of Lindisfarne off the northeast coast of Britain. While this may not be the first event of the Viking Age, it is certainly the most memorable, and it has come to characterize this period in the medieval world. The Scandinavian seafarers we think of as Vikings would not have considered themselves part of a unified group; their loyalties lay with a particular leader or lord. But their activities over the next 200 or so years eventually gave rise to the national identities of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. While most Vikings were Scandinavian, not all (or even many) Scandinavians were Vikings; most were farmers or craftspeople. Scholars are unsure why these seafarers turned outward from Scandinavia in the 8th century, but all agree that the Viking diaspora was remarkable for its swiftness and spread.

Several elements contributed to the Vikings' success as seafarers and raiders; these, in combination with the location and situation of Lindisfarne, produced a perfect storm that made the sacking of the monastery almost inevitable. Perhaps the most important element of Viking success was their skill as ship builders and seafarers. Longboats were remarkably strong, fast, and maneuverable. Lindisfarne was situated in close proximity to the Vikings'

usual maritime territory on a tidal island with plenty of beaches for easy landing. It was known to be filled with treasure, and it was inhabited by men who either could not or would not fight.

In the 9th century, Viking raiders traveled throughout the known world and beyond, sometimes simply raiding, at other times settling down. Swedes, Norse, and Danes each focused their attention on a different part of the medieval world. The Swedes penetrated deep into the Continent, all the way to Russia; some of them joined the elite protective unit of the Byzantine Empire, the feared Varangian Guard. The Norse looked west; some 500 years before Columbus "discovered" the New World, they established settlements in Newfoundland, Greenland, and Iceland. The Danes focused on England and the Carolingian Empire; their raids became so frequent and so violent, desperate peoples took to paying a bribe called the Danegeld (literally, "Dane gold") to persuade the Danes to leave their communities unmolested.

Scholars are unsure why these seafarers turned outward from Scandinavia in the 8th century, but all agree that the Viking diaspora was remarkable for its swiftness and spread.

By the end of the 10th century, the days of Viking marauding were mostly over, and many of these fierce warriors had settled down into new, stable, agricultural communities. One of these settlements was in the area of France now called Normandy, taking its name from these "northmen." The Norman leader, Rollo, was made a count; his heirs, over the next few generations, rose to the status of dukes. One of the scions of the House of Rollo, William of Normandy, would later conquer England, reshaping that nation's social, cultural, and linguistic institutions in dramatic ways. ■

Suggested Reading

Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages*.

Sawyer, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some common misconceptions people today hold about the Vikings and their activities in the 8th–10th centuries?

2. How does the story of the settlement and society of Iceland flesh out our thinking about the medieval world and its various societies?

Alfred the Great

Lecture 10

Yet while [the Vikings] penetrated throughout the medieval world and beyond … in Britain an unlikely king put a stop to their activities and achieved peace—albeit, only temporarily—with the Viking invaders. That king was named Alfred.

The only English monarch to be given the epithet "the Great," Alfred, king of the West Saxons, seemed unlikely to ever come to the throne at the time of his birth. Under his rule, the Viking threat was resolved; the remaining Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were consolidated; and an ambitious program of learning, education, and the arts flourished. In many respects, Alfred was similar to Charlemagne in his vision for his kingdom. In his account of Alfred's life, Einhard emphasized stories of Alfred's youth that foretoken his later love of learning, his ascent to the throne of Wessex, and the skill and cunning with which he defeated the Vikings.

Alfred the Great overcame remarkable odds to defeat the Vikings and unite the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms into one nation—England.

As the youngest of five sons, there was no early indication that Alfred of Wessex would ever become king of his father's realm. When Alfred was born in 848, there were four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, and Wessex. Although Anglo-Saxon rulers were not strict adherents to primogeniture, they did not believe in dividing wealth and property among all heirs. Any aetheling, or prince, might be deemed successor to the throne; usually one was chosen either by his father or by consensus of the family or immediate community. Alfred inherited the

throne in 871 after the death of his father and brothers—most of whom met their ends fighting against Viking invaders. Although he was never expected to inherit, his official biographer, a monk named Asser, composed an account of Alfred's life that suggested he was destined for greatness from a very young age.

Alfred's reign was remarkable for several reasons. The Vikings were a huge problem in 9th-century England, one that a number of English rulers had tried to address with little success. Alfred himself had several false starts at making peace with them. Part of Alfred's eventual peace with the Vikings involved ceding much of what had been the northern portion of Anglo-Saxon England to them, creating a true kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons and a territory known as the Danelaw. Ever the pragmatist, Alfred created a system of fortified towns, roughly equidistant from one another, known as the Burghal Hidage. Skilled seamanship made the Vikings such a significant threat, Alfred also commissioned a fleet of ships to augment the land defenses, an act that has given him the title "father of the English navy."

Once the threat of the Vikings was diminished, Alfred sought to bring greater stability to English society.

Once the threat of the Vikings was diminished, Alfred sought to bring greater stability to English society. One way he did this was through the compilation, simplification, and codification of earlier laws. Alfred was very similar to Charlemagne—whom he consciously imitated on several occasions—in his desire and actions to preserve learning and create a system of education in England. Alfred felt strongly that the Viking attacks were punishment from God. Thus he also actively promoted the church, having many monasteries and churches devastated by the Viking attacks rebuilt. As part and parcel of his other reforms, Alfred sought to make his court a place of culture and learning. He thus tried to attract the greatest minds of the age to his court, ushering in a flowering of arts and letters that came to be known as the Alfredian Renaissance. Alfred's reforms set the stage for formation of the England we know today. ■

Suggested Reading

Abels, *Alfred the Great*.

Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways did Alfredian England mirror the policies, programs, and achievements of the Carolingian Empire under Charlemagne? In what important ways did the Alfredian Renaissance differ from the Carolingian?

2. What role did religious belief play in Alfred the Great's successful negotiation of peace with the Vikings? How did Alfred connect learning, books, and the religious tradition of England in his own words?

The Rearrangement of the Medieval World

Lecture 11

The watchword from about 900 to 1050 in Western Europe is "fragmentation," as formerly large realms divided themselves into smaller political entities—a process that was moved along by external as well as internal pressures. Then, as we move firmly into the High Middle Ages, particularly from 1100 on… medieval society begins to assume the forms that most of us … tend to think of as quintessentially medieval.

Around the year 900, Western Europe began to rearrange itself. New leaders, their power based in military might, came to the fore, in the West as in the Byzantine and Islamic worlds, spurred on by Viking, Magyar, and Muslim invasions. Entering the High Middle Ages, Europe underwent further dramatic changes, including a population explosion, economic changes, technological advances, and the development of devout Christian piety among all classes. These changes would lead to significant expansionist moves, including the Saxon push to the east, the Reconquista of Spain, the movement of Normans throughout Europe, and the crusading impulse. The religious fervor associated with the advent of the Crusades would also be felt in other areas of European society and would lead to the final break between the Byzantine and Roman churches.

El Cid captured Valencia from its Muslim rulers in 1094, a significant Christian victory during the centuries-long Reconquista.

Starting around the year 900, Western Europe began to rearrange itself in several different ways. One of the most profound was in terms of religion. In the Christian and Islamic worlds, almost all peoples that had previously practiced some form of polytheistic religion converted to one of the three

major monotheistic religions. Latin, or Western, Christianity, would develop into what we know today as Roman Catholicism, while Byzantine Christianity gave rise to the Eastern Orthodox Church. The two churches began to go in different directions in the 8th century over iconoclasm and sharply different attitudes about the blending of secular and religious official duties.

Starting in the 10th century, the medieval world, due to external and internal pressure, began to fragment and rearrange itself roughly into the cultural and political entities we recognize today. Externally, Western Europe was pressured by various peoples on the move, including Muslims, Magyars (Hungarians), and Vikings. Internally, various peoples put additional pressure on the social and political structures of the medieval world, including expanding groups of Normans and Saxons. A revival of religious sentiment led Christian leaders to call for the Reconquista—a reconquest of Muslim Spain by Christian forces. The calling of the First Crusade set many groups of people on the move across Europe toward the Middle East.

By the 10th and 11th centuries, Christianity had fully trickled down into all classes, so that true religious faith was a powerful motivator in all social classes.

Two fundamental changes in medieval society were at the root of most of this movement and expansion. The upper classes had become militarized, and greater emphasis was placed on patriarchy and primogeniture. Thus there were many younger sons denied inheritances but who nevertheless had military skills with which they could carve out a living. By the 10th and 11th centuries, Christianity had fully trickled down into all classes, so that true religious faith was a powerful motivator in all social classes.

In addition to the increased emphasis placed on military prowess and religious belief, several demographic changes played into Europe's rearrangement. From 1000 to 1300, the population of Europe roughly doubled, from approximately 38 million to 74 million. By 1300, most external invasions ceased. Slavery virtually disappeared. It was replaced by the more humane—and less expensive—system known as serfdom, improving quality of life

for many. Advances in farming produced greater crop yields, and a warmer climate—known as the Little Warm Age or Little Optimum—helped produce still greater yields and made life easier for people at all social levels.

The major expansive moves of the 10th–12th centuries laid the foundation for many social developments that would occur in the later Middle Ages. The Normans, perhaps more than any other group, demonstrated successful social advancement as a result of military skill. They effectively "Normanized" much of Western Europe, claiming much of the British Isles and Sicily as their own. The Reconquista was a success (from a Christian point of view) primarily because of infighting within the Caliphate of Cordova. It also led directly to the formation of the new kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal. Christian zeal led to a positive response to Pope Urban II's 1095 call to retake the Holy Land and Jerusalem. The Saxon *Drang nach Osten* (push to the east) was unique among these movements in that it was a push to secure more land for a growing population and was effected primarily through the resettlement of peasants onto lands that Saxon lords wished to claim. The various political entities of Europe had become more powerful and assertive—and more aware of the world beyond Europe's borders than previously. A new identity boundary—Christian versus non-Christian—would unify otherwise discrete and disparate European societies. ■

Suggested Reading

Linehan and Nelson, *The Medieval World*.

Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. What role did religious belief and conversion play in the reshaping of Europe's borders in the 10th and 11th centuries?

2. How did medieval methods of self-identification—political, cultural, religious, and social—differ markedly from the ways in which modern people tend to identify themselves? Where can we see continuities of self-identification from the medieval to the modern period?

The Norman Conquest and the Bayeux Tapestry

Lecture 12

Harold stands between two reliquaries that most likely held the bones of saints—and with a hand on each, swears to support William's claim to the throne. … Soon after [Harold's] return to England, Edward the Confessor dies, and Harold—violating his oath to William—becomes king of England. The occasion of his coronation, according to the tapestry, is marked by a meteor or comet in the sky—an omen of ill fortune for the English.

The Norman Conquest of England was in effect a family dispute. The life of one woman in particular, Emma of Normandy, helps illustrate the interconnectedness of the ruling families. Emma was the daughter Richard I, Duke of Normandy. To maintain peace between the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons, Emma was married to King Aethelred II of England. When Aethelred died, Emma was promptly taken as a wife by the Danish king, Cnut, who claimed to be ruler of Denmark, Norway, and England; England at this time was more part of the Scandinavian than the Continental world. Emma became mother and stepmother to four other English rulers. First came her stepsons by Aethelred, Edmund Ironside and Harold; then her son by Cnut, Harthacnut; then finally her son by Aethelred, Edward the Confessor, returned from exile to take the throne.

The major and immediate situation that led to the Norman Conquest was the fact that Edward the Confessor had no heirs. He had spent much of his life living in exile in Normandy and had supposedly developed a fondness for his Norman cousins. One of these, William, was the grandson of Edward's uncle (his mother's brother). William claimed Edward had named him as heir. While there may be some truth to this, it seems clear that near the end of his life, Edward had a change of heart and named his brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson, as the heir to the throne.

Although many chronicle accounts tell the story of the Norman Conquest, one of the most fascinating accounts is pictorial: the piece of embroidery known as the Bayeux Tapestry. The tapestry is 231 feet long and tells the

The Tower of London was the first Norman castle in England, built under the direction of William the Conqueror.

story of the Norman Conquest in colorful embroidery, most likely executed at Canterbury by English hands. According to the tapestry, near the end of his life Edward sent Harold across the channel to confirm that William would inherit the English throne. It shows William rescuing Harold from a precarious situation in Normandy and the two cementing their friendship by engaging in various military campaigns. Harold is depicted as swearing to uphold William's claim to the throne. On his return to England, however, Harold is shown to renege on his oath and assume the English throne on Edward's death.

Here the tapestry skips over some of the key events that contributed to William's conquest of England, the most important of which was the surprise invasion by King Harold Hardrada of Norway. While William and his assembled fleet waited for good weather to cross the English Channel, Harold Hardrada invaded the North of England. In a stunning military victory, Harold Godwinson and his army defeated Hardrada at the Battle of Stamford Bridge on September 25, 1066. Two days later, William and his army set sail and landed at Pevensey. Bolstered by his victory at Stamford

Bridge, Harold moved his army south in a forced march to meet William's army on October 14, 1066.

According to the tapestry, the battle that raged was a fierce one, and it looked for a time as if Harold would prevail. William's army held the disadvantageous downhill position. The crush of bodies in the battle was so thick that according to some accounts—and graphically depicted by the tapestry—there was not even room for the dead to fall. At one point a rumor swept the battlefield that William had been killed or had fled. He removed his helmet to show his troops that he was still alive and in the thick of the battle. The tide was firmly turned in favor of the Normans when Harold was killed by an arrow through the eye.

The crush of bodies in the battle was so thick that according to some accounts—and graphically depicted by the tapestry—there was not even room for the dead to fall.

The Norman Conquest is a rare historical instance where, almost overnight, everything about a culture was transformed. Within just a few years, 99 percent of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy had either been killed or displaced. The wealth and lands of some 4,000 English were redistributed among just 200 or so of William's barons. The language of the ruling class switched from English to a type of French we call Anglo-Norman. Other changes—from hunting laws to the use of stone for building and the introduction of the fireplace—were also attendant on William's conquest of England. By far the greatest effect was that from this point on, England would be more a part of the continental European world than of the Scandinavian world. ■

Suggested Reading

Bloch, *A Needle in the Right Hand of God*.

Chibnall, *Debate on the Norman Conquest*.

Lewis, *The Rhetoric of Power in the Bayeux Tapestry*.

Questions to Consider

1. How might later medieval history been different if England had remained part of the Scandinavian rather than continental European world?

2. What kind of value does a historical witness such as the Bayeux Tapestry have in comparison to more typical documentary evidence from the medieval world?

King Arthur—The Power of the Legend

Lecture 13

The story of King Arthur was both popular and useful politically—and as we'll see, a variety of groups and people used the Arthurian story to promote often-conflicting agendas. The story of King Arthur has been popular for centuries, and his legend has been and continues to be so compelling because it is, at its foundation, a story about what is best in human nature.

Perhaps no other legend has been as enduringly popular as the story of King Arthur. Claimed as ancestral tales by various groups from the Middle Ages to the present, the story of Arthur's reign and the exploits of his knights have been used to entertain, persuade, and promote a political agenda in almost every time and place in Western Europe and beyond. Achieving international fame with the appearance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* in the 12th century, the Arthurian story was quickly translated into several languages and became one of the most popular bodies of literature ever known.

The story of King Arthur has been used by a variety of peoples over the past 1,000 years to entertain, to inspire, and even to promote a political agenda—not surprising, as the Arthurian legend at its core is about what is best in human nature, restoring order out of chaos, and making the world a better place. The reality on which the legend is based, however, was quite different from that depicted in medieval romances. To understand the legend's enduring power, we need to examine its origins.

The Celtic peoples immigrated to the British Isles in about 500 B.C. In the 1st century A.D., parts of Britain—roughly the area of modern-day England—were incorporated into the Roman Empire. With the fall of Rome, the legions withdrew and the Romanized Celts were left to the depredations of various invaders from present-day Ireland, present-day Scotland, and the Continent. One man, whose name was Arthur or something like it, was able to stem the tide of invasion for a time and restore some peace and stability to Celtic Britain. Although most scholars agree that the legendary Arthur is

likely based on a real person, there is much dispute about exactly who he was, as there is very little concrete evidence from 5th- and 6th-century Britain. The Arthur-type figure quickly became larger-than-life, and many oral and written legends sprang up concerning him.

Archaeological evidence seems to confirm his association with certain places in Britain, particularly Tintagel, Glastonbury, and Cadbury Hill. At Tintagel in Cornwall, long held to be the birthplace of King Arthur, evidence shows the settlement of a very powerful leader here in the 5th or 6th century. In 1998, archaeologists uncovered a 5th-century stone inscription there bearing a name that looks very much like "Arthur." Glastonbury Tor is usually associated with the Isle of Avalon, to which Arthur was carried after his final battle to be healed or to die, depending on the version of the legend; nearby Glastonbury Abbey was long reputed to be the final resting place of Arthur and Guenevere. In 1190, a grave attributed to them was discovered at the abbey, though it may have been a hoax. The Iron Age hill fort of Cadbury Hill has long been associated with the legendary Camelot, Arthur's court, due to the age and

Tintagel Castle, Cornwall, is the legendary birthplace of King Arthur. Recent archeological evidence seems to support this legend.

scale of an early medieval refortification at the site. Scholars estimate that it would take a minimum of 800 men—eight times the size of a typical war band—to man and defend it.

In addition to archaeological evidence, textual and literary evidence suggests that there was indeed an Arthur-type figure active in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. Fifty years after Arthur's supposed death, the name starts to appear in the royal genealogies of Britain, when it was previously completely unattested. He also shows up in a very early poem from about the year 600 called the *Goddoddin*, in which another character is described as being a great warrior, yet "he was no Arthur."

In addition to archaeological evidence, textual and literary evidence suggests that there was indeed an Arthur-type figure active in the late 5th and early 6th centuries.

While the core of the legend may be based on reality, many of the more popular aspects of it seem to have no basis in fact. Arthur was most likely never called king—it is more probable he was referred to as a war leader of some kind. The name "Camelot" is not attested until the 12th century. Merlin, the wizard-advisor, is not associated with Arthur until Geoffrey of Monmouth links them in his largely fictitious 12th-century *History of the Kings of Britain*. The Round Table and its famous knights, considered by many a central element of the legend, is also not attested until the 12th century. Additionally, many of the knights—in particular Lancelot—appear to be creations of French authors who wished to embellish Arthur's story with their own flourishes. Every age and culture has tended to create a version of Arthur that embodies the very best ideals from their own society. The broad appeal and fascination with Arthur continues to this day. ■

Suggested Reading

Lacy et al., *The Arthurian Encyclopedia*.

Snyder, *The World of King Arthur*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is it about the legend of King Arthur that makes it one of the most enduringly popular stories to this day?

2. How was the development of the legend shaped by specific nationalist and political agendas? How has the legend of Arthur been appropriated and manipulated over the past 1,500 years?

The Three Orders of Medieval Society

Lecture 14

It was believed that in order for society to function successfully, members of each order needed to fulfill their destinies. A peasant should be the best peasant he could be; the knight should be the best knight he could be; and the priest should be the best priest he could be—and none of them should attempt to fill the offices of the other.

As we move into the High Middle Ages—starting around the year 1000, the medieval world began to organize itself in terms of the hierarchical social structures we most often associate with it. This social structure is usually known as the three estates or the three orders. At the top of the hierarchy were the nobles—those who fought. The next tier was made up of members of the church—those who prayed. In many respects, this estate overlapped with the nobility, and the two often vied for prestige and power. At the bottom of the order was the largest group, the peasants—those who worked. They comprised 90–95 percent of the population. There was very little opportunity for advancement out of the lowest estate for most of the medieval period.

Perhaps the best means of understanding the three-estates model can be found in an examination of the general prologue to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer wrote at the end of the 14th century, a time when the model held powerful sway over the medieval imagination but its long-static divisions were beginning to collapse. He was not the first to write in this literary genre, known as estates satire, but he is arguably the writer who did it best. He makes use of the stereotypes in new and interesting ways and included representatives of the rising merchant class.

A quick examination of just a few of the characters helps us to understand the model and see how it was shifting at the end of the 14th century. Chaucer moves in order through the estates, at least initially. The knight represents the militaristic aspect of the noble classes, the original source of their power and status. He is a warrior who is distinguished in his description by the number of campaigns in which he has fought. The squire, the knight's son,

represents aspects of noble identity that had come to be just as important, if not more so, by Chaucer's day. While still a fighter, the squire is identified primarily by his devotion and service to ladies.

His next descriptions are of members of the clergy. Both the prioress and the monk play to stereotyped ideas about how the clergy often fell short of the ideals they were supposed to embody. It has been said that there is not an honest miller in all medieval English literature, and Chaucer plays true to that stereotype with his representation of the miller as a coarse, drunken, base fellow who regularly cheats his customers. The plowman, on the other hand, represents the ideal of the third estate—honest, hard-working, and utterly anonymous. Several pilgrims in the general prologue do not fit neatly into the three-estates model. Perhaps no figure displays this better than the Wife of Bath, whose status as a widow and a merchant contradicts traditional medieval ideas of both gender and class. ■

It has been said that there is not an honest miller in all medieval English literature, and Chaucer plays true to that stereotype.

Suggested Reading

Ganshof, *Feudalism*.

Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*.

Questions to Consider

1. What caused the ideal of the three orders of medieval society to maintain its potency long after it had ceased to function successfully in reality?

2. How does the work of Geoffrey Chaucer variously support and undermine the social division into those who fight, those who pray, and those who work?

Pilgrimage and Sainthood

Lecture 15

At the center of most medieval *mappae mundi* is the city of Jerusalem, a fact that reflects its centrality in the consciousness of medieval Christians. It was the center of the world, and although the journey could be long and dangerous—usually lasting some months or more—a pilgrimage to Jerusalem was one of the greatest expressions of religious faith available to medieval Christians.

For medieval Christians, Jerusalem was the holiest city in the world, and a journey there—a pilgrimage—could be a way of seeking forgiveness for sins and of healing afflictions. Closer to home, people might undertake numerous pilgrimages to holy places near and far throughout their lifetimes for a variety of reasons. Usually a site was considered holy because of its association with a particular saint, but the process by which a person achieved sainthood was far from regularized, and many figures long venerated were later declared not to be saints by the medieval church. The surviving accounts of these would-be saints and the pilgrims who flocked to their shrines provide a fascinating glimpse of popular religious expression in the Middle Ages.

The activity of pilgrimage is not unique to Christianity; many religions that predate Christian hegemony in the West include pilgrimage as part of their practices or rituals. As early as the 4th century, Christians were making journeys to sites they viewed as imbued with certain holy or spiritual aspects for a variety of reasons. Medieval people might have several different motives to undertake the rigors and expense—which were sometimes substantial—of a pilgrimage.

In the earliest days of pilgrimage, one of the major motivations would be to seek healing. Many ill and ailing people essentially took up residence in these locations, and the monks and nuns often cared for them in what would become a de facto hospital. People also made pilgrimages to seek forgiveness for their sins. Pilgrims might be self-motivated or sent by a confessor. The desire to prove that one had completed a pilgrimage led indirectly to the

creation of pilgrim badges, a kind of early souvenir keychain. The third major reason people tended to go on pilgrimages was to offer thanks for an instance of good fortune. A fourth reason, one that Geoffrey Chaucer hints at, is that pilgrimages, for reasons of safety and economy, tended to be undertaken in groups, so it was in many respects a social activity—kind of like the early version of a luxury cruise.

What made a site holy and thus worthy of a visit was usually its association with a particular saint or being the repository of saintly relics. Prior to the 12th century, there was little in the way of a formal process for declaring someone a saint. A process known as canonization was put in to place—and still exists to this day—to assist the church in determining whether or not a person in question had been a saint or not. It is important to understand that the church did and does not "make" saints; it only affirms the status that God has conferred on the person in question. This process could not always counteract popular sentiment, as demonstrated by the example of Saint Guinefort—a greyhound revered in the 13th century.

The possession of a saintly relic could be a benefit to a religious house, as it would encourage more pilgrims to visit, many of whom would make donations.

Once a person had achieved sainthood, that person's bones and personal effects—clothing, hair, even fingernails—were often considered to be imbued with holy and healing powers. One of the key factors in determining whether someone was a saint was the test of incorruptibility, whereby the lack of decomposition of a person's corpse was regarded as a sign from God that this person was a saint. It is rather ironic, then, that many saints' remains were broken up and dispersed among several religious sites. The possession of a saintly relic could be a benefit to a religious house, as it would encourage more pilgrims to visit, many of whom would make donations.

With the Protestant Reformation, many holy shrines were dismantled, and in some cases the bones and other relics of saints were destroyed. The activity of pilgrimage continued, however, and it remains an important aspect of religious life for Christians—both Catholic and Protestant—today. ■

Suggested Reading

Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage*.

Webb, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways did medieval pilgrimage both strengthen and undermine the position and status of the institution of the Western Church?

2. What qualified one to be a saint? How did different criteria for holiness or sainthood reflect particularly medieval concerns and ideals?

Knighthood and Heraldry

Lecture 16

At the same time that pilgrimage was increasing in frequency and popularity, in the secular realm interest in genealogy and bloodlines was becoming almost a religion unto itself among the nobility. One of the most fascinating aspects of this almost obsessive interest with the science of heraldry,

In the High Middle Ages, a new class of person was added to the lowest rung of the ladder of nobility: the knight. Although in its earliest stages the position was open to anyone who could afford the necessary equipment—sword, armor, horse, and shield. As knights came to be considered members of the nobility, there arose a desire to limit and define the ranks of knighthood and to make the office a hereditary one. By the 13th century knighthood had become hereditary and had developed a complex system of rituals, identity practices, and public displays that were increasingly distant from its original, practical function of military skill and defense. Over the course of the High and late Middle Ages, the function of a knight began to shift, moving away from the practical activity of warfare and toward ideals of gentility, courtliness, and what we call chivalry—the combination of martial prowess with romantic behavior toward ladies.

One of the most interesting ways that knights and other nobles sought to define their individual identities—and that of their families—was through the practice of heraldry. The practice of painting one's shield with a particular image or color arose for practical reasons: On the battlefield, one fully armed and helmeted knight looks very much like another. Over time, these images came to be associated with a particular family and came to be referred to as coats of arms

The science of heraldry came to be quite rigorously defined, with only certain colors or textures allowed, and then in only certain patterns or orders. The elements of a coat of arms were basically three—colors, metals, or furs. Any of these materials could be used to represent a particular animal or symbol, but there was a strict process of interpretation. A heraldic device was "read"

from background, or "field," to foreground. Also, a color could never be placed on a color, nor a metal on a metal, nor a fur on a fur. The eldest male member of a household bore the family's coat of arms in its pure, or original, form, whereas sons of the main branch or members of related branches might bear coats of arms that differentiated themselves in some way—by changing the color of the background, reversing the main symbol, or adding a border or band over the top. Such differentiations are known as marks of cadency, or brisures, words that simply mean "difference" in Old French. An entire language to describe and explain these heraldic devices, with a specialized vocabulary and syntax, was quite developed by the end of the Middle Ages. Coats of arms came to be regarded as the exclusive property of a particular family. On occasions when members of two different families discovered that they were each bearing similar or identical coats of arms, a court case to decide the legitimate bearer of the arms might ensue.

An entire language to describe and explain these heraldic devices, with a specialized vocabulary and syntax, was quite developed by the end of the Middle Ages.

As advances in weaponry made the mounted knight almost obsolete, the ideal of the knight as a champion of justice, righter of wrongs, and devoted rescuer of ladies became enshrined in the popular literature, especially that dealing with King Arthur. Geoffrey of Monmouth was arguably the first writer to link excellence in combat with romantic love in *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Writers in 12th- and 13th-century France took the ideal of the chivalric knight to new extremes, particularly in stories of Sir Lancelot. At the end of the Middle Ages, an Englishman named Sir Thomas Malory glorified knighthood and knightly activity in his *Morte d'Arthur* at precisely the same moment when knighthood had become more of a blight than a boon to society, as the Wars of the Roses in England would demonstrate resoundingly. The ideals of knighthood and chivalry would continue to hold sway over the popular imagination well into the early modern period, when writers such as Spenser, Sidney, and even Milton would look back toward the medieval world with a kind of nostalgia. ■

Suggested Reading

Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*.

Keen, *Chivalry*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the philosophy of chivalry transform from one of practical function to one concerned with abstract concepts like love, honor, and loyalty?

2. How was the real world of medieval knighthood influenced by literary representations of it, and vice versa?

The Gothic Cathedral

Lecture 17

When Gothic architecture appeared on the scene in the early 12th century, the architectural elements it used were not necessarily new, but what Gothic did is borrow from different architectural traditions and combine these elements in an utterly new and original way that made it possible to construct houses of worship that seemed to soar—that were taller and lighter than any that had been seen before and thus, seemed a truly fitting place to try and become close to God.

In the year 1140 at the church of Saint-Denis outside Paris, France, a new form of building came into being that would dominate European architecture for several centuries to come: the Gothic. Prior to the 12th century, most religious structures were built in the Romanesque style, which was based on the Roman basilica with its rounded arches. The Gothic style, which first appeared in the 12th century, was not in itself radically new in terms of building techniques; what was original was the way it combined existing architectural techniques to create something new.

Notre Dame de Reims, a 13th-century cathedral in the French Gothic style.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Gothic architecture is its pointed arches, a feature that had flexibility and many benefits compared with the rounded Romanesque arch. Another element that differentiated Gothic from Romanesque was the use of rib vaulting, which gave the interior of a building a much lighter feel than the rounded, Romanesque barrel vault. Instead of breaking up the interior space of a building with thick support columns, the Gothic style used the flying buttress—supports that were built outside

the structure and were used to transfer much of the weight, or thrust, of the building into the ground.

Within two centuries, literally hundreds of Gothic cathedrals sprang up throughout much of the Continent and in England. The layout of a Gothic cathedral is fairly standard and follows a cruciform model. The building of a Gothic cathedral was a massive undertaking that involved hundreds of workers, from skilled architects and master craftsmen to laborers who transported the massive stone blocks and put them in place. Many Gothic structures were simply superimposed over existing buildings. In Canterbury Cathedral in England, the choir and nave were each rebuilt at different times, and when one descends into the crypt, the style is quite clearly Romanesque.

By the 14th century, Gothic had become strongly localized. In France, the emphasis was on large round windows and a substyle called flamboyant. Spanish and Portuguese treatments of Gothic architecture tended to focus on decorative flourishes, many of which may seem bizarre to the modern eye. German and central European styles played with a wild and wide variety of vaulting patterns. In England, styles diverged into two main trends: decorated and perpendicular.

The carvings at Chartres also deliberately juxtapose religious subjects with secular ones, an attempt to link the rulers of France with the power of God.

Two examples—Chartres Cathedral in France and Salisbury Cathedral in England—can help us see how the Gothic style became so localized that each structure was unique. Chartres Cathedral was constructed and added to over many centuries, so we can see a number of different substyles of Gothic in its edifice. There is a deliberate lack of symmetry in its facade. One spire is much higher than the other, and each is executed in a different style. The carvings at Chartres also deliberately juxtapose religious subjects with secular ones, an attempt to link the rulers of France with the power of God. In contrast with Chartres, the major construction of Salisbury Cathedral took place in nearly record time—just 38 years for the construction of the main portion—but like Chartres, significant additions and changes were made over the years. Perhaps its most

famous element is the spire, the tallest such on a medieval cathedral that still stands today. However, mistakes were made in its construction, and its massive weight is causing the stone piers inside the cathedral to twist and bend. Salisbury also has a cathedral school, one whose origins can be traced back to the 11th century. Coincidentally, it was most likely the place where John of Salisbury, one of the greatest philosophers and academic minds of the medieval world, received his initial education before traveling to Chartres to continue his studies. ■

Suggested Reading

Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage*.

Wilson, *The Gothic Cathedral*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did advances in technology and architectural engineering make possible the construction of Gothic cathedrals, and/or how did the desire to build these structural marvels contribute to improvements and innovations in building techniques?

2. How do the two examples of Chartres and Salisbury demonstrate consistencies in Gothic architecture while underscoring the possibility for localized differences?

Piety, Politics, and Persecution

Lecture 18

The long-standing rift between East and West had been felt most strongly in the Great Schism of 1054, but for all that, the idea of a unified church—and even more, the idea of a re-unified Roman Empire—still held a great deal of appeal, and events on the borders of the Byzantine Empire seemed to present an opportunity to bridge the gulf between East and West.

In the year 1095 at the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II called for Christian knights to embark on a venture that was part holy war, part pilgrimage, to try to wrest the Holy Land—and the city of Jerusalem in particular—away from the Turks. As an incentive, he offered papal dispensation for the sins of a lifetime to all those who participated. Throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, there would be numerous attempts to conquer and hold the territories of the Middle East, considered the inheritance of Christ, although only the First Crusade can truly be called a success, and many later Crusades—most notably the Fourth—never made it beyond the borders of the Byzantine Empire. Eyewitness accounts offer a fascinating and occasionally horrifying glimpse into the realities of life on a Crusade.

Although ruled by adherents of Islam, followers of all three monotheistic faiths were living generally peaceably side by side in Jerusalem in the 11th century, when Pope Urban II called the First Crusade, urging his Christian brethren wrest Jerusalem from Muslim control. Urban's call to "take up the cross" in 1095 proved the lasting potency of the idea of the Roman Empire, as one of his stated reasons for this venture was to assist the citizens of the former eastern half of the empire. Urban was also building on Pope Alexander II's earlier call for the Reconquista of Spain.

Although devout religious belief was certainly a major factor in the enthusiastic response to Urban's call, other factors helped create the climate for a military conquest of the Holy Land. The pope and the patriarch of the Byzantine Church had long squabbled over who was supreme head of the

faith. In 1054, Pope Leo IX sent a delegation to Constantinople to address the issue. The debate led to each church excommunicating the other's members—a schism in effect to this day. A related issue was the Investiture Conflict, a debate over who had the power to appoint religious leaders: the head of the church or the head of the secular government.

Urban announced two primary goals for the First Crusade: to liberate Christians living in territories that had been overrun by Turks and to free Jerusalem from Muslim rule. The First Crusade was promoted as a kind of pilgrimage, but one that was new and unique: a military pilgrimage. Only men of fighting age were (supposedly) allowed to participate, and those Christians living near Muslim Spain were told to remain home and focus on reconquering that territory for Christianity. Although we use the words "Crusade" and "Crusaders" today, the word was not used in the 11th century; rather, those who participated were described as "taking the cross," a reference to the embroidered red cross they wore to indicate to the world their sacred mission.

Although those who took the cross were supposed to receive official sanction from the pope, other groups set off early for the Holy Land without papal approval. The most notable of these was the Peoples' Crusade (or the Peasants' Crusade). These Crusaders went overland through the Rhineland, home at that time to some of Western Europe's largest Jewish communities. According to several eyewitness accounts, they engaged in what amounted to wholesale slaughter of these communities, despite the vigorous efforts of many secular and religious leaders to stop them. The Crusaders made it as far as Anatolia, where most of them were sold into slavery or killed.

New orders of knighthood were created to protect European settlers in the Levant and pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem.

The legitimate Crusading forces did eventually reach the Holy Land, and as they went, they conquered. By the time they made it to Antioch, they were plagued by illness and starvation, and many formerly wealthy noblemen had lost almost all their possessions and money. But Antioch would mark the turning point in the First Crusade. After seven months, Antioch was

finally betrayed to the Crusaders by one of its own citizens. On entering, the Crusaders slaughtered every Turk in the city. Hearing this news, the Fatimids, who were in control of Jerusalem, rejoiced, thinking the Crusaders would prove their allies. They were thus completely unprepared when, on July 15, 1099, the Crusaders showed up and conquered Jerusalem. The conquest of Jerusalem makes the First Crusade the only one that could really be called a success. The Crusaders established four main regions in the Holy Land: the county of Tripoli, the county of Edessa, the principality of Antioch, and the kingdom of Jerusalem. Together, these were known as Outremer, a French word meaning "across the sea," or "over the sea."

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, a Cistercian monk, wrote the rule of the Knights Templar.

New orders of knighthood were created to protect European settlers in the Levant and pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem. Perhaps the most famous of the crusading orders was the Knights Templar, who took their name from their headquarters in the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Templars were an utterly new kind of knight in that they were also monks. They soon became incredibly wealthy through their banking system. Their wealth would inspire much jealousy and eventually lead to their downfall and dissolution. The Knights Hospitaller were established shortly after the Templars. Their main objective was caring for sick and injured pilgrims once they arrived in the Holy Land. A third order, the Teutonic Knights, were established near the end of the 12th century for the express purpose of caring for injured or ill Crusaders.

The hold of Western forces over Middle Eastern lands was tenuous at best, and it was not long before much of Outremer was retaken. Western forces

were further compromised by individuals fomenting conflict with local leaders, particularly Muslims, even though those in the upper echelons of the ruling elite sought practical solutions that would allow peoples of various faiths to live together in harmony. ■

Suggested Reading

Linehan and Nelson, *The Medieval World*.

Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did concerns over the status and power of the Western church lead to the calling of the First Crusade in 1095?

2. How many of those who participated in the Crusades seemed to do out of sincere belief and piety? How many seemed to do so for purely material gain? Were these two goals necessarily mutually exclusive?

The Persistence of an Ideal

Lecture 19

If we define Crusade as a military effort to bring portions of the Middle East—particularly Jerusalem—under Christian control, then we can identify roughly eight or nine within the medieval period, but each of these were actually a series of waves of invasions, so it's safest to say that pretty much from the 12th century until the end of the Middle Ages, someone, somewhere, was always mounting some kind of Crusading campaign or another.

After the somewhat surprising success of the First Crusade in 1099, Europeans set up four Crusader states in the Middle East, where they sought to recreate feudal society. But life in Outremer was different in significant ways from life in the West. European settlers discovered that accommodation with—rather than dominance over—Middle Eastern populations of Muslims, Jews, and others was the most successful way to negotiate life in the Levant. Although the Western presence in the Holy Land lasted less than 200 years, Crusading ideals would have a profound impact on the European world throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

During the High Middle Ages, crusading fervor spread throughout the medieval world. In addition to Crusades to the Holy Land, campaigns were launched against Muslims in Spain (the Reconquista), Cathars (also called Albigensians) in southern France, and Jews and other non-Christians throughout Europe. The Second and Third Crusades to the Holy Land occurred in the 12th century and were launched to reclaim parts of Outremer that had been lost in the interim. Participants in these Crusades were a veritable Who's Who of European nobility: Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, King Richard the Lionheart, King Louis VII, and Emperor Conrad II, among others. While most Crusaders returned to Europe after the First Crusade, those who stayed behind quickly discovered that accommodation and friendship—rather than conquest and domination—with Muslims and other peoples was the only way any Crusader state could sustain itself.

The decline of the Crusader states began in 1144, when Edessa was recaptured by the Muslim leader Zengi, precipitating the call to the Second Crusade. By far the most formidable opponent facing the Crusaders was the Muslim leader Saladin, whose recapture of Jerusalem led to the calling of the Third Crusade in 1187. Saladin was a man of great intellect, generosity, and mercy as well as a brilliant military strategist, and his chivalric interactions with King Richard the Lionheart would pass into European folklore and myth.

By far the most formidable opponent facing the Crusaders was the Muslim leader Saladin … a man of great intellect, generosity, and mercy as well as a brilliant military strategist.

After the Second and Third Crusades, the Holy Land was essentially given up as lost, although many other Crusades would be called throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. The Fourth Crusade in 1204 only made it as far as Constantinople, where the invading armies, arguing that the Byzantine Empire had strayed from the true faith, sacked the city and "liberated" much of its wealth and religious relics. From the sack of Constantinople, it was only a small step to turning crusading zeal on citizens of the West. In 1208, a Crusade led primarily by people from northern France engaged in almost wholesale slaughter of several heretical Cathar communities in the south, the result of a perfect storm of religious zeal and greediness for land and wealth. Similar horrors manifested in 1212, when two large groups of children—some estimates put the figures as high as 30,000—headed off on the Children's Crusade.

The idea of a Jerusalem ruled over by Christians remained a potent one, and attention once again turned toward sending military forces to retake the holiest of cities for Christendom. The Fifth Crusade, launched in 1218, focused most of its attention on Egypt—at that time the center of the Muslim world. This Crusade and those that followed were all dismal failures. In 1291, the Christian stronghold of Acre fell to the Muslims, and any Christian dominance in the Levant was ended. The Christian leaders still in Outremer retreated to the Isle of Cyprus, where they styled themselves as rulers in exile, always planning for a return to Jerusalem. The Crusading movement

did not really exhaust itself until 1798, when the remnants of the Knights Hospitaller, then located on Malta, formally disbanded. ■

Suggested Reading

Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*.

Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. What were some unanticipated and unintended consequences of the crusading fervor that gripped the medieval world in the 11th–15th centuries?

2. Why did the idea of a Christian kingdom in the Middle East remain so potent long after any possibility of such an institution ceased to exist? How were crusading ideals expressed "at home" in Western Europe?

Late Medieval Religious Institutions

Lecture 20

In the High and late Middle Ages, concerns over proper religious belief and practice were widespread and not confined only to official branches of the church. … The Fourth Lateran Council … sought to codify and clarify various aspects of religious belief and practice in a move that was unprecedented in its concern for the spiritual well-being of lay people.

Throughout the High and late Middle Ages, the religious institutions of the medieval world were transformed in dramatic and sometimes unexpected ways for a variety of reasons. Monasticism was subject to several reform movements, and new religious orders like the Franciscans and Dominicans came into being. The highest office of the church, the papacy, experienced a schism that at one point had three rival popes all claiming legitimacy. Heresy became a bigger problem, leading to Crusades against particular groups of Christian heretics. These struggles led to a variety of reforms and a more bureaucratic church. While many reforms were directed at members of the clergy, other reforms—especially those of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215—more directly affected the lay population.

Saint Francis of Assisi founded his order of monks in 1209 on the principles of strict poverty and mendicant preaching.

Until the late 11th or early 12th century, the dominant form of monasticism was Benedictine, named for Saint Benedict of Nursia's monastic rule, a guide for all aspects of monastic life. Although all monks took a vow of poverty, in practice this ideal proved

difficult to adhere to, and many Benedictine monasteries were quite wealthy by the 11th century. One of the first attempts at reform of Benedictine life was the Cluniac movement, which began in the 10th century. An offshoot of the Cluniacs were the Cistercians, who wished to adhere to a stricter interpretation of the Benedictine rule, particularly with regard to living a life of poverty, but in time they too became excessively wealthy. The mendicant, meaning "wandering," orders came into existence in the 13th century. They include the Dominicans and the Franciscans.

Concerns over proper religious belief and practice were widespread and not confined only to branches of the church. In particular, the rise of certain popular heresies, such as Catharism, led to crackdowns—often violent ones. As part of the religious zeal that led to the First Crusade at the end of the 11th century, various local Crusades took place within Western Europe with the intent of rooting out heresy. Several inquisitions were held to question suspected heretics and to either punish or reform them. Although the idea of inquisition looms large in the modern imagination, most of the overly persecutorial acts we tend to associate with "The Inquisition" occurred during the early modern period.

Marriage, which until this point had been primarily a secular and economic institution, was officially made a sacrament.

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council, convened by Pope Innocent III and attended by religious leaders and clergy from throughout the medieval world, sought to codify and clarify various aspects of religious belief and practice in a move that was unprecedented in its concern for the spiritual well-being of lay people. Among other religious issues, the council clarified the dogma of the doctrine of the Trinity and the miracle of transubstantiation—the transformation of communion bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ. The necessity of priestly celibacy was affirmed, and standards of conduct for religious figures were articulated. Rules about frequency of confession and communion for lay people were clarified and codified. Marriage, which until this point had been primarily a secular and economic institution, was officially made a sacrament. The council also issued decrees concerning those who were outside the faith—like Jews—ordering that

they wear some distinguishing clothes or mark to identify themselves as non-Christians.

Near the beginning of the late Middle Ages, the papacy found it was not immune to the disputes over proper behavior and concerns over relationships with the secular world, a situation that led to the Western Schism. From 1309 to 1377, the office of the papacy was not in Rome but in Avignon, France, as the seven popes who were elected at that time were all French. The last of these popes, Gregory XI, moved the papacy back to Rome. After his death, the College of Cardinals was under pressure to elect a Roman, which they did in the face of rioting mobs who feared the papacy would otherwise go back to Avignon. A group of dissenting cardinals disagreed with the election of a little-known Pisan to the church's highest office; they elected their own pope, whom they installed in Avignon. By the time the dispute was resolved by the Council of Constance in 1417, three men had all claimed simultaneously to be the true pope, and the crisis had embroiled all the major nations of Europe, who were forced to choose sides. The stature and reputation of the office of the pope had been seriously damaged, and it would be some time before it recovered. ■

Suggested Reading

Linehan and Nelson, *The Medieval World*.

Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why did monastic reform movements ultimately fail in their attempts to "perfect" Benedictine monasticism?

2. How did disputes over the office of the papacy affect and contribute to political and economic issues in medieval societies?

The Magna Carta

Lecture 21

"In 1215, England's wealthy barons refused to give King John the money he needed to wage war unless he signed the Magna Carta. The document codified that no man was above the law. Unfortunately for the peasant class, it did little to address how many were below it."

—Jon Stewart, *America (The Book)*

If you ask someone today, "What is the Magna Carta and why is it important?" you will most likely get answers like "It is the cornerstone of American justice system," "It is a triumph for the common man over the power of the monarchy," or "It is the foundation of the idea of human rights as we know them." While it is true that the Magna Carta has come to symbolize all of these principles, such concerns were not a major factor in its creation. When it was drafted by the rebellious English barons who met England's King John in a meadow at Runnymede on June 15, 1215, the clauses historians and reformers identify as most significant today were buried deep in the middle of the document and were not of primary concern to the barons who forced John to accept it.

Many people might be surprised by the events and issues that led to the signing of this document in a meadow at Runnymede by King John of England in 1215. The Magna Carta was drafted by nobles to benefit nobles. The heretofore almost unheard-of situation in which nobles were able to pressure a king into giving up many of his absolute powers had a number of causes. King John is perhaps best known from the Robin Hood legends, in which he is portrayed as doing a poor job while his brother, Richard the Lionhearted, was away on Crusade. The stories are not far off the mark. During his reign, England's once-mighty Angevin Empire shrank dramatically; he levied a series of outrageous taxes to pay for several largely unsuccessful military campaigns; and he increased the fees—known as "farms," the source of our modern word—that local sheriffs traditionally paid to keep their positions. Additionally, John placed England in a state of spiritual crisis by refusing to accept the pope's selection for archbishop of Canterbury. The pope placed

all of England under interdict, meaning all manner of religious practice and comfort was denied to its citizens.

Fed up with this situation and John's abysmal leadership, 25 barons of the realm confronted John at Runnymede in 1215 and forced him to sign the Magna Carta, or Great Charter. An examination of the clauses of the original document gives us an idea of the abuses John had perpetrated on his subjects. Clause 2 established limits for death taxes, which John had been steadily increasing in an attempt to build up the monetary holdings of the Crown. Clauses 3 and 6 deal with wardship over minors in line to inherit substantial money and land. John had essentially been selling wardships to the highest bidder, often contravening the explicit wishes of the heir's families. Similarly, John had been arranging marriages between wealthy, widowed heiresses and those willing to pay the Crown a substantial kickback for the privilege. Clauses 7 and 8 stopped this practice. Clause 12 dealt with scutage, the fee nobles could pay rather than performing their military service. The levying of scutage had happened only eight times in the 38 years John's father had been on the throne; by contrast, John had demanded scutage 11 times in 17 years.

It would not have been surprising if the Magna Carta were forgotten after John's death.

After signing the document, John attempted to have it declared null and void and was plagued by a new series of troubles. Back in the pope's good graces after accepting the pontiff's choice for archbishop of Canterbury and agreeing to submit on other matters, the interdict was lifted and John got the pope to declare the charter invalid. Soon John became embroiled in a dispute with the pope's candidate for archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, leading to a series of rebellions throughout England. Disgusted with John's behavior, many nobles approached Prince Louis, son of King Philip Augustus of France, and offered him the throne of England. By the summer of 1216, two-thirds of English barons had recognized Louis as king. John went on the offensive but died suddenly of dysentery in 1216.

It would not have been surprising if the Magna Carta were forgotten after John's death, but one of his most loyal retainers, William the Marshall

(or simply William Marshall) made sure the document was reissued and reratified, after making some amendments and revisions. William Marshall was the regent for John's son, the minor King Henry III, and his reissuing of the Magna Carta was a shrewd attempt to gain noble support for the young king. Marshall rewrote the document so that it had appeal for both loyalist and rebel barons. Henry III helped his own cause by affirming the charter of his own accord in 1225. It was not until the 17th century that the Magna Carta began to be cited as affirming the rights of a king's subjects by specifically defining and limiting the powers of the monarch. At this point, the Magna Carta began to enjoy the iconic status that it has today. Over time, shifting interpretations have made it a hallowed object in the history of human rights in England and around the world. ■

Suggested Reading

Breay, *The Magna Carta*.

Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why is the signing of the Magna Carta considered such a watershed moment in the development of human rights when, at the time, it was considered relatively insignificant for most of the English population?

2. What is the long-term effect of the intersection of secular and religious concerns that helped precipitate the signing of the Magna Carta?

Daily Life in a Noble Household

Lecture 22

Whether peasants were free or bound, worked the land, or practiced a trade or craft in a village or town, it is a fact of most medieval communities that they were in some way attached to—or associated with—the household of a particular lord.

A noble household in the Middle Ages was a world unto itself. Cooks, scribes, teachers, butlers, reeves, pantlers, and other servants all worked together in a complex unit designed to cater to the needs, desires, and ambitions of the noble family, who in turn were beholden to all whom they held in their employ, providing shelter and protection. This arrangement was reciprocal; all those who worked for the noble family were under their protection and were supplied with food and shelter in recompense for their labor. This relationship often extended to the peasants who worked the manor's fields. In return for protection and the right to sow and harvest their own crops, peasant farmers gave their lord a portion of their harvest and a certain number of days of labor per week, season, or year.

In the modern imagination, the castle is most often associated with the idea of the noble household, but most medieval castles were far from the luxurious structures familiar from film and popular culture. Until almost the early modern period, castles were built first and foremost with defense and protection in mind. The most basic castle was the motte and bailey, in which the keep, or stronghold, was erected on top of an enditched hill, or motte; the life of the household took place in the enclosed courtyard below, the bailey. Contrary to popular belief, many castles were originally built out of wood and later replaced with stone structures.

The center of any noble household was the great hall, where many of the household staff—as well as the lord and lady—might sleep. Sometimes lord and lady occupied a small room above the great hall called a solar. Even in the late Middle Ages, when a lord and lady had quarters separate from the main hall, they might sleep in a curtained, four-poster bed while servants slept nearby, often on a cot by the fire. Privacy is a relatively modern

concept. Other buildings usually radiated outward from the great hall, and construction might happen over years or even centuries as storage rooms, kitchens, chapels, guest chambers, servants' quarters, stables, and other buildings were added to the main structure.

The day in the noble household began at daybreak and was typically busy. In most noble households, hearing Mass was the first order of the day, after which a light meal was eaten. From here the lord and lady usually went about their separate pursuits—he administrating and hunting, she running the household and embroidering. By far the most important event of the day was dining, and there were more or less elaborate processes for the preparation and serving of food depending on whether it was a feast day or holiday, whether there were guests staying in the household, and the rank of those guests. The main meal of the day, dinner, took place between 10 am and noon and might involve several courses. Menus varied according to the seasons and were prepared by a team of kitchen workers; the kitchen itself was some distance from the main hall because of concerns about fire. The character of Geoffrey Chaucer's Franklin provides us with a glimpse of what a high-ranking member of society might consume and in what style he might consume it, as do numerous images from the famous *Luttrell Psalter*, one of the richest witnesses of daily life in the medieval period.

The character of Geoffrey Chaucer's Franklin provides us with a glimpse of what a high-ranking member of society might consume and in what style he might consume it, as do numerous images from the famous *Luttrell Psalter*.

One of the greatest responsibilities—and potentially lucrative activities—of a nobleman was to oversee the peasants who lived on his manor and who were under his protection. Lords had the right to demand a complex range of rents, ranging from the modern equivalent of death and marriage taxes to a certain number of days of labor per year to a percentage of the tenants' harvest. The entrenched hierarchical structure of medieval society and the stranglehold the lords held over their peasants changed dramatically in the middle of the 14th century, when the Black Death wiped out at least a third of the population. Lords

were now desperate for labor, giving peasants bargaining power. Although there were attempts to hold on to the preplague social structure, the three-estates model would continue to hold force as an ideal, rather than a practical reality. ■

Suggested Reading

Ganshof, *Feudalism*.

Gies and Gies, *Daily Life in Medieval Times*.

Linehan and Nelson, *The Medieval World*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways was the medieval nobleman both above the majority of the population and inextricably connected to—and responsible for—it?

2. How did the Black Death affect the social model of the three estates, particularly the noble classes?

Daily Life in a Medieval Village

Lecture 23

Many villages came into being due to their proximity to the manor of a nobleman—to whom most of the villagers owed service. For most of the Middle Ages, the lives of members of the first and third orders of medieval society were thus inextricably intertwined, even as the realities of their daily existence were radically different from one another.

The majority of the population of the Middle Ages lived in rural, agrarian communities typically called villages. The medieval village was often a small cluster of dwellings surrounded by fields in which crops were planted on a rotating basis. It was usually attached to a manor and was home to agricultural laborers, brewers, millers, blacksmiths, tanners, butchers, and others who practiced a variety of occupations. Although very little textual evidence describing village life survives, archaeological excavations at villages such as Wharram Percy, along with pictorial evidence from manuscripts such as *The Luttrell Psalter*, help paint a picture of the medieval village as place brimming with life and characters.

In the High Middle Ages and beyond, most villagers fell into one of two categories—those who were free, called freeholders, and those who were not, called serfs. Slavery had disappeared by about the year 1000. Freeholders were responsible for farming their own land. Serfs might own some of their own land, hold land from their lords from which they paid the lord a percent of their harvest, and owe the lord labor on his lands. Although it might seem strange, if one were to ask a medieval villager if he would prefer to be a freeholder with a small amount of land or a serf with large quantities of land, he would likely choose the latter.

Medieval village life was full of bustle, sights, sounds, and smells. Although they did not engage in modern hygiene practices, medieval people did bathe regularly and take care of their teeth. Villagers tended to live in one of two types of houses: the cottage or the longhouse. The houses had a toft, or fenced front yard, where the household animals resided. Behind the house was the garden, or croft, similar to today's kitchen garden. Most cottages were simple

Longhouses, like this Viking farmhouse, housed both families and, in cold weather, their livestock.

one-room structures; longhouses tended to be a bit larger to accommodate a family's animals when the weather turned cold. Most cottages had a central hearth with a small hole in the thatched roof to allow smoke to escape; the fireplace was a relatively late invention. Most homes were built of wood, often using the wattle-and-daub method. The day began early in the medieval village, as people rose and went to work with the rising of the Sun. Life as a peasant meant a life of physical labor, most of it agricultural.

Most of our information about medieval village life comes from archaeological excavations at villages such as Wharram Percy and Elton.

The Luttrell Psalter, a luxury manuscript commissioned by Geoffrey Luttrell, includes numerous illustrations depicting everyday life for the common person in the medieval period. Farm implements and techniques give one an idea of the rigors of agricultural work. Other images offer an idea of daily tasks such as cooking

and tending to other necessities. The psalter's illustrations also depict people pursuing various amusements during their free time.

Most of our information about medieval village life comes from archaeological excavations at villages such as Wharram Percy and Elton, which stand as two contrasting examples of how medieval villages might be structured and oriented. Wharram Percy seems to have been laid out according to a plan, with homes and farmland placed regularly and equally around the village church. Elton, in contrast, seems to have come into being somewhat haphazardly, with its multiple hubs and houses facing any which way.

By the 15th century, the medieval village was on the decline. Many people were attracted to the growing towns and cities. The devastating effects of the plague had ravaged the populations of many villages and wiped some off the map completely. The enclosure movement—whereby much land previously reserved for farming was given over to sheep grazing—hastened the decline of the medieval village. ■

Suggested Reading

Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound*.

Jones, *Medieval Lives*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways was life in a medieval village similar to modern rural life? In what ways was it significantly different?

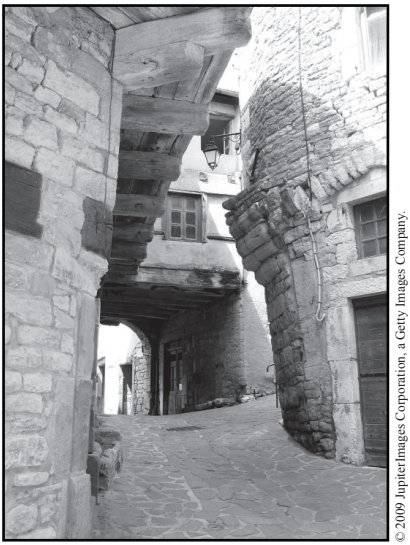
2. How did citizens of a medieval village define and identify themselves, especially in contrast with those who lived in urban centers?

Medieval City Life

Lecture 24

As the Roman Empire declined in the 4th and 5th centuries—so, too, did urban life. There would be no true cities in the medieval West again for at least 500 years. … As we head toward the 14th century, the medieval world is in a land crunch—there are more people and not as many places to put them, a fact that contributes markedly to a revival of urban life not seen since the days of the Roman Empire.

In the early Middle Ages, urban life virtually disappeared. In the High Middle Ages, advancements in agriculture, in conjunction with a doubling of the population between 1000 and 1300, led to reurbanization of the medieval landscape. As urban life revived, the traditional three-estates model of medieval society found itself under considerable pressure. The new merchant class became a powerful force; many of its members achieved wealth on par with or exceeding that of many nobles, leading to the first real possibility for upward social mobility. Land- and cash-poor nobles, eager for wealth, began to arrange marriages with members of the merchant class, who were themselves eager for titles and noble status. While London and Paris had somewhere between 25,000 and 50,000 citizens by the end of the High Middle Ages, the greatest concentration of urban centers was found on the Italian peninsula: Florence, Bologna, Padua, Genoa, Milan, and Venice, which all had grown wealthy through trade.



The 14th century saw a revival of urban life in Europe. In some cities, medieval buildings and streets survive to this day.

Life in a medieval town was distinctly different from life in the rural, agrarian countryside, although technically those who worked the land and those who worked in the city were members of the same estate. One of the most noticeable differences was proximity to one's neighbor: Houses leaned right up against one another, and sometimes different families shared a single household. The problem of removing waste and refuse was one of the major preoccupations of town governments. Although villages certainly had crafts- and tradesmen, cities had them in greater abundance, and practitioners often grouped together on a single street, which was then named for the occupation. Most trades- and craftspeople lived above a street-level shop. Trades such as tanning, fulling and dyeing cloth, and butchering produced strong and unpleasant smells, so these activities often took place far from the center of town.

Tradesmen were, by the late Middle Ages, strictly regulated by the charters of their guilds. Medieval guilds were like a cross between the modern labor union, trade school, and fraternity. They trained apprentices, enforced quality standards and workers' rights, and gave financial support to sick and injured members. Guilds were also social organizations, holding parties and celebrations, and many developed secret rites. In England they were well known for the annual staging of mystery plays, which depicted various episodes from the Bible.

Although guilds were one of the most powerful forces in medieval city life, they were theoretically subject to the dictates of the town government.

Although guilds were one of the most powerful forces in medieval city life, they were theoretically subject to the dictates of the town government, which was responsible for the day-to-day health and safety of the townspeople. Town government officials built and maintained defensive walls, instituted the night watch, and assigned regular days for the sale of particular good and services. In Italy, individual towns formed communes for protection and defense. Various factions sought to gain control of the towns' elected councils; in particular the *popolo grosso*—the "fat people," the wealthiest—and the *popolo minuto*—

the "little people"—engaged in never-ending power struggles in towns like Siena and Venice.

As we move from the High to the late Middle Ages, we see medieval townspeople becoming less and less like their rural counterparts. Due to the demands of business and industry, many medieval townspeople were literate and had a grasp of mathematics and economics; there was also an increasing demand for schools and educational opportunities for the children of the urban bourgeoisie. While farming peasants still thought of themselves as functioning within a feudal hierarchy, townspeople tended to think of their relationships in horizontal, rather than vertical, terms. The revivification of urban life would profoundly affect all areas of the medieval world. Religious practices, social order, the economy, warfare, and the arts would all undergo significant transformations within the bounds of the medieval city walls. ■

Suggested Reading

Frugoni, *A Day in a Medieval City*.

Gies and Gies, *Daily Life in Medieval Times*.

Questions to Consider

1. What aspects of urban living declined with the end of the Roman Empire? What social conditions needed to exist for urban centers to develop in the medieval world?

2. How did medieval town life affect the social model of the three estates? How did urbanization benefit medieval society? In what ways did it undermine certain medieval institutions?

Food and Drink

Lecture 25

Imagine, if you will, a world without chocolate … a world without coffee. But that was the medieval world. It was also a world without tomatoes, or corn, or even potatoes. There is no sugar in the medieval world until quite late in the period. It is, in so many ways, a world whose tastes and smells are vastly different from our own.

Although the medieval world lacked many foods that most of us consider fundamental to our culinary and dining experiences, people in the Middle Ages were not condemned to bland, bad tasting, or spoiled food. Medieval cuisine could be both delicious and innovative. Any study of medieval food and drink will be skewed by the surviving evidence. Recipes preserved in household books or otherwise written down were not typical, everyday fare but rather special-occasion dishes, more complicated than the food eaten regularly. The recipes preserved tend to be heavily weighted toward meat, poultry, and fish, with little mention of vegetables, so for a time it was believed that medieval people ate very little in that way; in fact, the opposite is true. Vegetables were so much a part of the daily diet that there was little or no need to preserve instructions for their preparation.

By far the most important foodstuff in the medieval world was bread. Medieval bread was most likely denser and browner than most bread consumed today, and extra ingredients were occasionally added to give it more heft. Although bread was eaten daily and with almost every meal, very few people baked their own; they would take grain to the local miller to be ground, prepare the raw dough, and then bring that to the baker's for baking. Large slabs of bread, called trenchers, were also used as dishes. Once a meal was over, the diner could consume the plate, which had sopped up many sauces and flavors.

Perhaps the most notable difference between medieval and modern cuisine is the use of spices. As the account books of great medieval households show, spices and sweeteners were greatly prized, and careful track was kept of how much was used and when. As today, salt and pepper were the most commonly

used spices. Salt was especially valued because it could be used to preserve meat. Spices favored by medieval cooks that remain relatively little used in modern Western cuisine include mace, galingale, cardamom, spikenard, and saffron. Honey was the primary sweetener. Sugar was a late arrival, meaning that for most of the Middle Ages, tooth decay was relatively rare.

Honey was the primary sweetener. Sugar was a late arrival, meaning that for most of the Middle Ages, tooth decay was relatively rare.

A medieval feast was a special occasion, primarily for the nobility, with certain conventions of hospitality and good manners. Everyone brought his or her own knife—forks were not yet in common use—and tablecloths doubled as napkins; at major feasts, the cloths would be changed between courses. Several medieval authors, including Chaucer, describe proper behavior at a feast. While the nobility enjoyed a diet heavy in protein, peasants tended to eat a diet heavy in vegetables. As long as planting and harvesting were not disrupted by drought, warfare, uncooperative weather, and so on, medieval people enjoyed a diet that was in some respects healthier than ours.

When it came to beverages, the safest choice in the medieval world was something alcoholic. Water was in many instances unsafe to drink, given that rivers were the garbage dumps of the day. Well water was a bit safer, but due to poor understanding of hygiene and sanitation, this water could also be contaminated, especially by human and animal waste. Brewing ale became a necessary and lucrative activity, especially for women. The drink of choice among the upper classes was wine, although until the 18th century, all wine was drunk young. Mead, made of fermented honey, was most commonly drunk in Scandinavian societies. ■

Suggested Reading

Hieatt and Butler, *Pleyn Delit*.

Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. What kinds of misconceptions do modern people tend to hold concerning medieval cuisine? What are the sources of these misapprehensions?

2. How did medieval tastes differ markedly from modern ones? How important were food and dining in medieval culture compared to modern culture?

Music and Entertainment

Lecture 26

While the medieval world and its people seem in many ways very different and far removed from the modern world and our own experiences, in most respects they were very similar to us—particularly with respect to their desire and enthusiasm for musical entertainment and diversions of other types.

Medieval people engaged in a variety of activities to fill their leisure time. Music was a popular diversion, although the instruments used—such as the shawm, lute, psaltery, gemshorn, and rebec—produced sounds and melodies that might sound unusual to the modern ear. Very little popular music has survived from the Middle Ages, but manuscript drawings, archaeological finds, and literary references tell us they enjoyed musical entertainment ranging from large formal groups of musicians to itinerant minstrels. We have clear evidence of the importance of music in medieval church services, where it was a major component of the Mass.

The account books of many great households show significant sums paid for musical entertainment at feasts. In parts of Europe, most notably Occitania (part of France) and later England, the traveling minstrel, or troubadour, was able to make a living moving from great household to great household, providing entertainment for its occupants. Medieval musical instruments, while similar in many respects to modern instruments, produced musical sounds that may sound strangely foreign to our modern ears. Standard instruments included the lute, vielle, recorder, rebec, shawm, drum, and crumhorn. Because musical notation that includes rhythm is a relatively late development, often we simply have to guess when reconstructing medieval songs and dances.

In addition to music, medieval people had a variety of gaming activities to occupy their leisure time. Perhaps the oldest and simplest game of luck was dice. Records show people brought to court over dice-gambling debts, and archeologists have found evidence of cheating—namely, weighted dice. Board games such as nine man's morris, fox and geese, and the seemingly

unpronounceable Welsh game gwyddbwyll, many of which seem to be some variation on checkers or backgammon, were popular throughout the medieval world. By far, however, the most popular board game of the medieval world was chess, which originated in the Arab world. William Caxton, the first printer in England, printed *The Game and Playe of Chesse* in the late 15th century.

The most popular board game of the medieval world was chess, which originated in the Arab world.

Although we often do not think of true theater performances as coming into existence until the 16th century with the construction of purpose-built theaters like the Globe, drama and theater were common pastimes in the medieval world. Medieval drama had its origins in liturgical drama, plays that occurred in church, usually on important feast days, and involved acting out biblical scenes for a congregation that could not understand the Latin of the standard Bible. This evolved, particularly in England, into the Corpus Christi dramatic performances, wherein the entire story of the Bible would be performed over the course of one day. A third kind of dramatic performance—one for which we have the least surviving evidence—would be given by a troupe of traveling players whose repertoire would include religious material and nonreligious, popular stories. Such traveling players could only move about the country if they were officially members of a lord's household and bore his badge to prove it. The lord, in return for his sanction of their itinerant life, expected his players to return to his estate at Christmas and other holidays to entertain guests and family. With the creation of permanent structures for dramatic performance in the 16th century, drama flourished in a way that it could not have in the medieval world. ■

Suggested Reading

Gies and Gies, *Daily Life in Medieval Times*.

Jones, *Medieval Lives*.

Questions to Consider

1. What does the evidence about recreation and leisure in the medieval world suggest about the nature of the societies of the Middle Ages? What surprises you about these activities and pastimes?

2. Do you see any continuities between medieval musical tastes and modern ones? What might account for these differences and similarities?

Dress and Fashion

Lecture 27

Margery Kempe … relates how she was a slave to fashion before she began having her spiritual encounters with Jesus Christ. … She describes her earlier desire to be fashionable as evidence of the sinful nature she once possessed. … Clothing could be used to announce to the world something about Margery's spiritual state—her outer covering said something about her inner soul.

Although very little clothing has survived from the medieval period, pictures in medieval manuscripts and entries in household account books give us some idea of what medieval clothing was like. Imagine a world without zippers, in which a lady might sew the sleeves of her gown on every day and unstitch them at night, and in which one's head was almost never without some sort of covering. Although basic articles of clothing were similar in style for most classes, the quality, color, and ornamentation of dress often served as indicators of social status. Sumptuary laws restricting the amount and kind of fur trimmings or the color of clothing indicate a concern that wealthy, nonnoble merchants might be mistaken for nobility. While function was their primary concern, people in the Middle Ages were also quite fashion conscious.

Although there was striking uniformity of fashion throughout the Middle Ages, there were also some remarkable and original variations as the period progressed, especially among members of the noble classes and those who aspired to move up in society—usually the merchants. The basic article of clothing for both men and women, peasant and noble, was the tunic with sleeves. It was usually ankle length for women and knee length for men. Under the tunic, which was usually wool, might be a linen cotte, or kirtle, and over those, a surcoat might be worn. The other universal element was some sort of head covering, ranging from a simple cap to an elaborate women's headdress using wire or other supports to maintain its shape.

By the end of the medieval period, the wardrobes of men and women had become a little more developed and elaborate. As undergarments, a man wore

a shirt, or chemise, and hose, or chausses, which were somewhere between trousers and tights. Over his shirt he wore a doublet, and over this a sort of gown, or robe. In cold weather, he might add a cloak or cape. By the end of the Middle Ages, a woman also wore hose, and as an undergarment a smock, or chemise. Over this she might wear a kirtle, and on top of this a gown or robe. In cold weather, she would add another layer, such as a mantle, or manteau.

The greatest differences in medieval fashion are not seen across time but rather across class.

The greatest differences in medieval fashion are not seen across time but rather across class. Without a doubt, peasant clothing was the simplest and most practical, as its wearers were usually engaged in manual labor. Manuscript illuminations depicting peasants laboring in the fields often show them barefoot, with the long ends of their robes tucked up around their waists for ease of movement. Shoes were often made of leather that provided little protection against the elements, particularly muddy streets, so peasant and noble alike might strap wooden platform clogs on over their shoes to avoid the mud and the damp.

We tend to see the greatest fashion variety among the noble classes, including fashion for the sake of fashion—that is, impractical clothing that announces its wearer's wealth. Many women's fashions included dresses with sleeves that would need to sewn onto the gown each morning—a task requiring the help of a maidservant. Women of the upper classes also wore elaborate headdresses, many of them constructed out of wire and several pounds of cloth, making them look like ships under full sail. By far the greatest indicator of nobility was the use of jewels and fur as clothing adornments. As the merchant class grew in wealth and power in the High and late Middle Ages, many of its members sought to imitate the style and dress of the noble classes. This situation led to the passage of sumptuary laws, which restricted certain types of clothing and accessories to members of certain classes. ■

Suggested Reading

Gies and Gies, *Daily Life in Medieval Times*.

Piponnier and Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. What role did medieval fashion play in relationship to social status? How did functionality intersect with aesthetics?

2. What impact did contact with foreign cultures have on medieval fashion sense? How and why might fashions vary from place to place and time to time?

Medieval Medicine

Lecture 28

Most of the medical advances made in the European West during the Middle Ages came from the discovery or translation of Greek or Arabic medical texts. … As the 16th century, the three great authorities of medieval medicine are represented as two Greeks—Hippocrates and Galen—and a practitioner from the Muslim world—a man called Ibn Sina, or Avicenna.

To the modern individual, medieval medicine might seem an odd mix of superstition, folk remedies, astrology, and religious beliefs. Much medical practice in the Middle Ages was based on the theory of the four humors of the body. These humors—blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm—were thought to be produced by various organs, and the theory was that they needed to be in balance to ensure good health. Although many medieval folk remedies—such as the use of leeches—have been proven by modern medicine to have some beneficial effects, other medieval practices—such as bloodletting—were likely to do more harm than good.

The medieval West lagged behind Byzantium and the Muslim world when it came to the practice of medicine, and many of the advances in the medieval world came in the 11th century with the foundation of educational institutions devoted to the study of medicine, particularly in Italy, as well as the translation Greek and Arabic medical texts, such as that by the Islamic scholar Avicenna, into Latin or Western medieval vernacular languages.

The three most important experts on medicine in the Middle Ages were Avicenna and the ancient Greek scholars Hippocrates and Galen. At its core, the practice of medicine in the medieval world was Galenic—that is, based on the theories of Galen. At the center of Galenic theory was the idea of balancing the four humors—blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. The body also needed to be in balance in terms of heat, cold, moisture, and dryness. Galenic theory held that there were two critical elements in diagnosing an illness: the examination of urine and the checking of the pulse.

In the early Middle Ages, there was very little in the way of formal medical training in Western Europe; most medical knowledge was passed down orally. We start to see a shift in medical training and education in the 10th century. An interest in studying the theory and practice of medicine in a structured setting sprang up in the Mediterranean basin, particularly in the Italian towns of Salerno and Bologna. It is not surprising that this occurred first in the Italian city-states, as many of these had longstanding trading relationships with the Byzantine and Muslim worlds and were thus exposed to their medical texts and practices. Through Italian medical institutions, the medieval world first became aware of the theories of the brilliant Islamic scholar Avicenna, who based his theories on Galenic medicine and produced a compendium of all medical and pharmacological information available at that time.

From Salerno came the most important group of medical texts, known as the *Articella*, which would serve as the core of any medieval medical education from the 12th to the 16th centuries.

In the early part of the High Middle Ages, a Salernitan medical education—focused on practical matters of diagnosis and healing—was the best available. From Salerno came the most important group of medical texts, known as the *Articella*, which would serve as the core of any medieval medical education from the 12th to the 16th centuries. Salerno was unusual in its liberality; both men and women were allowed to study there, as were various non-Christians, including Jews and Muslims. Nowhere else were such freedoms allowed to minority groups. After the 12th century, the curriculum at Salerno became increasingly focused on theorizing medicine and the natural world, so that those who studied there not only referred to themselves as *medici*, or healers, but also as *physici*, or scholars.

Although medieval Western medicine generally lagged behind Byzantine and Muslim medicine, there was one area where physicians in the medieval European world made significant contributions and advances: surgery. Muslim texts had long shied away from the practical study of surgical procedures. Thus, when the schools at Salerno and Bologna began to include

dissection and surgical procedures in their curriculum, Western medicine made some important advances. Prior to the 13th century, a community's barber was frequently also its surgeon, simply because he had the requisite tools on hand. By the 13th century, however, surgery had become a legitimate field of medical study.

In the late Middle Ages, medical training became more formalized and structured. The real explosion of medical advancements, however, came in the 16th century, during the early modern period. Many of these later advances were due to the discovery of hitherto unknown medical texts and the ability to quickly make such information available via the printing press. The innovation and advances in medicine in the early modern period were largely dependent on two medieval inventions: the university system, which formalized the study of medicine, and the printing press, which first came into use in the medieval world in the early 15th century. ■

Suggested Reading

Glick, Livesey, and Wallis, *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine*.

Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did the theory and practice of medieval medicine demonstrate continuity with the world of classical antiquity? How did it differ from classical ideas about science and healing?

2. Why was medieval Italy so forward thinking in terms of those it admitted—women, Jews, and so forth—to the study and practice of medicine in its university system?

The Black Death and its Effects

Lecture 29

"Because of the growing strength of this disease it has come to pass that, for fear of infection, no doctor will visit the sick … nor will the father visit the son, the mother the daughter, the brother the brother, the son the father, the friend the friend, the acquaintance the acquaintance, nor anyone a blood relation—unless, that is, they wished to die suddenly along with them, or follow them at once."

—Louis Helygen, a medieval witness to the Black Death

As the medieval world headed into the 14th century, a land crunch began due to unprecedented population growth. This land crunch, combined with the climactic changes called the Little Ice Age, contributed to a famine in 1315 that killed up to 10 percent of the population in certain areas. Those who survived were usually in less than robust health. Some scholars feel that overcrowding, especially in cities, in combination with food shortages and the resulting general ill health, gave the plague that swept through the medieval world in the 14th century a particularly profound impact. This event was never actually called the Black Death during the medieval period. Those who lived through it tended to refer to it as blue sickness (because of the bluish-colored bruises some victims developed) or the great mortality.

Although there is some disagreement, most scholars think the cause of the Black Death was an outbreak of bubonic plague. Caused by the *Yersinia pestis* bacterium, which is generally carried by fleas on rats, bubonic plague traveled to the medieval world from Asia along trade routes. Ecological changes in Asia during the 14th century drove rodents out of their natural habitats and into closer proximity with humans, so plague could cross over into the human population. Plague was active in central Asia in the 1330s, and one of its worst aspects was that people knew it was coming; although they didn't understand the method of transmission, sources indicate that people west of an outbreak recognized it was heading their way.

There were three types of plague: bubonic, septicemic, and pneumonic. The bubonic type was named for the large swelled lumps, or buboes, that appeared on the sick around the lymph nodes in the groin or armpit area. This form was usually transmitted by the bite of an infected flea. Septicemic plague attacked the blood and had as its only benefit that death came more swiftly than for victims of the bubonic type, who lived for days in agony before vomiting blood and dying. A third type, pneumonic, was perhaps the most deadly in that it could be spread through the air. Death was even swifter than with septicemic plague—often in just a few hours. A cure for the plague was not discovered until the 19th century, but that didn't stop people living in the medieval world from trying to find treatments and preventive measures. The lancing of buboes was considered the only real intervention available once bubonic plague had manifested. Many people carried flowers or otherwise pleasant-smelling items near their noses in the belief that the pleasant smell would counter the presence of plague.

Many religious and lay people alike regarded the plague as divine retribution for humanity's sins.

Contemporary accounts paint a grim picture of understanding and reaction to the plague. Fear and panic led some to blame communities on the fringes of mainstream medieval society—Jews, lepers, and the like—for causing the plague. Some scientists blamed a particular alignment of planets for corrupting the air. Many religious and lay people alike regarded the plague as divine retribution for humanity's sins. This gave rise to the flagellant movement, in which groups of people would walk from town to town, whipping themselves, to try and atone for their sins by punishing their flesh.

From a cultural standpoint, the Black Death had a profound effect on art, the practice of memorialization, and social and economic matters. An artistic theme known as the *danse macabre* began to show up in churches, cloisters, and other sites. A cult of the dead that emphasized the memory of the departed had been in existence well before the 14th century, but it achieved new popularity. Social and economic changes that had already begun were hastened along, especially given that plague outbreaks recurred every generation or so well into the 16th century and beyond. ■

Suggested Reading

Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*.

Horrox, *The Black Death*.

Questions to Consider

1. How might European society have developed differently if the Black Death had never occurred?

2. What do the multiplicity of reactions to the plague tell us about the complexity of medieval society and the mindset of people living in the medieval world?

Childhood in the Middle Ages

Lecture 30

Lady Thomasine Tendryng, who died in 1485, was commemorated with a funeral brass that not only depicted her, but her seven children. Five of the children are dressed in shrouds, while two are represented as wearing clothing—suggesting that only two out of her seven children made it past infancy.

Until relatively recently, many people believed the concept of childhood was a thoroughly modern one and that medieval people had no such concept, nor were they emotionally attached to their children in the way that most modern people are. One of the most oft-cited pieces of evidence for this belief was the high infant mortality rate in the Middle Ages—estimated at about 30 percent. Only half of all children lived to age five, and it would not be uncommon for a medieval woman to give birth to 10 children but only see 1 or 2 survive into adulthood. Also contributing to the idea that medieval people did not feel great love for their children came from the practices of fostering and apprenticing children when they were still quite young.

Recent studies suggest that medieval people loved their children and genuinely missed and grieved for them when separated, whether due to fosterage, apprenticeship, or early death. Numerous written documents, letters, chronicles, and funerary monuments attest to their attachment and the loss they felt when their children died young. Fostering had its roots in the politically savvy idea of maintaining good relations among powerful families; often two families sent their offspring to be raised in each other's households, an exchange that ensured frequent visits between the members of each household. Among the lower classes, apprenticing a child at a young age was quite often an act of love: Apprenticeship usually guaranteed the child a bed, food, and a means of making a living that might otherwise be beyond his or her reach.

That medieval people had a clear concept of childhood is demonstrated by the popular and widespread belief, developed from the classical world, that

the life of a person was divided into several distinct stages. From birth to age seven was the *infantia*, or infancy. From 7 to 14 or so was considered childhood, or *pueritia*. At about 14, a child was thought to enter adolescence (*adolescentia*). For some medieval writers, this stage ended some time in one's 20s. Depending on the thinker or writer, there were three or four more stages of adulthood, a model in which people often passed through old age and into a second childhood, ending up, essentially, right back where they had begun.

Although little survives in the way of artifacts that attest to a clear concept of childhood, the evidence we do have clearly points to an idea that is not so different from our own.

Although little survives in the way of artifacts that attest to a clear concept of childhood, the evidence we do have clearly points to an idea that is not so different from our own. Medieval children were fed a special diet, wore specially made clothes, and often slept in specially constructed cradles or children's beds. Toys similar to those children still play with today—such as dolls and spinning tops—have been discovered in archaeological excavations. Some literary texts record games and songs that were favorites of medieval children.

For all its similarities with childhood in the modern period, however, childhood in the Middle Ages was also different in various important ways. Attending school—a requirement for all children in the United States today—was an option for only a small portion of the population. Medieval children tended to begin working much younger than modern children. Perhaps the biggest difference between then and now is the age at which children were considered eligible for marriage. While the average age of marriages in the peasant and merchant classes tended to hover around 18, the formal age of consent was usually 12 for girls and 14 for boys. Some noble marriages—particularly royal ones—might occur when the boy and girl were as young as eight, although they would not be consummated until later. In practice, it was not uncommon for medieval children to become parents before they had left adolescence; thus some medieval youths were understood as existing in

a sort of hybrid childhood-adulthood, a situation much less common today than it was then. ■

Suggested Reading

Orme, *Medieval Children*.

Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways do medieval concepts of childhood and adolescence differ significantly from modern ones? In what ways are they similar?

2. How did high infant mortality rates shape medieval thinking about the family unit?

Marriage and the Family

Lecture 31

In many respects, marriage was one of the fundamental cornerstones of medieval society, so it would make sense that those who held religious office thought it reasonable—and indeed, ideal—if marriage and its attendant issues were to come under ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Indeed, for many in the medieval world, marriage was regarded as first and foremost a method of avoiding damnation.

Although today many view the institution of marriage as enmeshed in religious practices, for most of the Middle Ages marriage was a secular institution. Couples were often married at the church door simply because it was the most visible, open space in their village. Only occasionally would any aspect of the ceremony take place inside a church; the presence of a priest—or any other witnesses—was not considered necessary until fairly late in the period, around the 12th century.

Although romantic love could be a part of a medieval marriage, this was the exception rather than the rule, and it varied depending on the social status of the parties involved. Theoretically, a marriage was not considered valid in the eyes of the church unless both parties consented, a policy that seems designed to ensure that both bride and groom felt some sort of romantic affection for the other. In reality, most marriages, especially in the upper strata of society, were more like business arrangements, designed to combine, consolidate, and maintain wealth, lands, titles, and political status for the families involved.

Medieval marriage practices varied widely depending on the time, the place, and the social status of the parties involved. In western and northern Europe, the bride and groom were usually close to one another in age, especially among peasants. Peasants attached to a manor needed their lord's permission to marry and paid a merchet, or marriage tax. In the south and Mediterranean areas, much older men tended to marry considerably younger women. Legally, by the High Middle Ages, age of consent was established

as 12 for girls and 14 for boys, although the actual betrothals might happen much earlier.

Family could be a complicated institution, no matter the social status of the parties involved, and there were many laws to protect the property of the wife and offspring of the marriage. Because of the high mortality rates, remarriage and blended families were more the norm than the exception. Divorce, while rare, could and did occur, especially in instances of abuse or nonconsummation, something that was tricky to establish in court; in at least one instance, several "honest women of the parish" attempted to arouse a man with no success. When they reported their results to the court, the marriage was annulled.

More than one marriage contract fell apart because of arguments over wealth and property.

Many customs and practices surrounding betrothal and marriage would seem unusual to us today. The decision to wed could involve a series of businesslike negotiations about issues like dowry; morgengabe, or "morning gift"; provisions for heirs; and so forth. More than one marriage contract fell apart because of arguments over wealth and property. Although most of the medieval population seemed to marry and separate at will, the church issued strict guidelines for behavior within the marriage, including days on which sexual intercourse was forbidden—usually because a particular day was considered holy. Love, especially in the upper strata of society, was expected to be found outside marriage. There were notable exceptions, such as King Richard II of England and his first wife Anne of Bohemia; at her death, Richard was "wild with grief," ordering the destruction of the royal residence where she died.

The political and economic reasons behind most noble marriages spurred a literary movement known as courtly love, popularized in the 12th century at the courts of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter, Marie de Champagne. It most likely had its source in poetry of the Arab world. Writers such as Chrétien de Troyes and the anonymous King Arthur poets emphasized idealized adoration that never crossed the line into consummation; pledging

devotion to a lady thus became a means of currying favor with her lord, as the love was understood to be innocent and pure.

Although the married couple was arguably one of the foundational elements of medieval society, a strain of antimatrimonial, misogynistic writings grew in popularity from the High to the late Middle Ages. Emphasizing the danger of lust, such writings characterized marriage as a stop-gap measure for slaking lust and preventing many people from going to hell. Central to this debate was the 13th-century French text *Le roman de la rose*; it would spark a series of written arguments for and against women, marriage, and family that came to be known as the *querelle de la rose*. In response to this movement, many elected to engage in chaste marriages, in which they married but pledged before a priest to abstain from sexual intercourse. In some instances, the husband and wife might enter monastic orders. ■

Suggested Reading

Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*.

Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways were medieval families different from or similar to modern families? What social, religious, and cultural factors affecting the makeup of the medieval family perhaps no longer exist today?

2. What effect might the representation of romantic love in medieval literature have had on real-life relationships?

Art and Artisans

Lecture 32

The Italian Peninsula was exceptional in many ways during the Middle Ages. It had a more continuous urban life than the rest of Europe, more extensive trade networks—especially with the Byzantine, Islamic, and Asian worlds—which meant that it was in many respects more cosmopolitan than the rest of the West. For these and a variety of other reasons, it also saw one of the most dense, and concentrated, and amazing periods of artistic production ever known in the Western world.

Although the early modern period (also called the Renaissance) is often heralded as a watershed in the development of Western art, the Middle Ages saw the production of many beautiful, skillfully executed, and whimsical artistic works. Much of the art that survives from the medieval world is religious and is most often to be found in one of two media: stone and parchment. Cathedrals and other religious structures were filled with many kinds of art—statuary, frescoes, mosaics, rood screens, misericords, and stalls—and were themselves, as a whole, great works of art. They offered craftsmen a chance to display their skills and, occasionally, their sense of humor.

Everyday objects—such as spindles, keys, chess pieces, and candlestick holders—reveal an appreciation for art and beauty in the most unlikely places.

Book production was the other major area of artistic expression in the medieval period. Some of the most stunning displays of artistic talent are found inside medieval manuscripts such as the *Book of Kells*, their images painstakingly executed by hand, rendered in brilliant colors, and containing intricate design elements. Before a word could be written or a single image drawn, animal hide was converted into a workable surface, known as parchment or vellum. From there, several people—or occasionally one multitalented individual—laid out and filled in the contours of each page, indicating where text and images should go. Illustrated, or illuminated,

manuscripts contained three types of image: pictures corresponding with the text, whimsical margin images that had little or nothing to do with the subject matter, and glorious and often breathtaking whole-page images called carpet pages. Book production was originally the domain of monasteries and monks, but as time passed, more and more nonreligious people became involved.

Other artisans and craftspeople produced objects that combined artistic sensibility with functionality. Everyday objects—such as spindles, keys, chess pieces, and candlestick holders—reveal an appreciation for art and beauty in the most unlikely places. Glassblowers produced everything from everyday utensils to stained-glass cathedral windows. Wood- and metalworkers crafted a range of objects from furniture to candlestick holders to reliquaries and other religious objects. Although few textiles have survived from the period, those who worked in the clothing industry—from dyers to weavers to seamstresses and tailors—produced clothing that could be considered works of art, especially vestments for religious leaders and rulers.

Medieval glassblowers produced everything from everyday utensils to cathedral windows.

The pride medieval artists and artisans took in their work is reflected in the rise of workers guilds, which functioned as crosses between a social club, labor union, and fraternity. The guild movement was especially strong in medieval Italy, which also had comparatively more urban centers than the rest of the medieval world. Eventually, the power of guilds throughout Europe would increase to the point that their leaders became major social and economic players on a national scale. ■

Suggested Reading

Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*.

Stokstad, *Medieval Art*.

Questions to Consider

1. How could works of art become important communal representations of the identity of a society or group of people?

2. How did medieval artisans and craftspeople think of functional pieces that displayed an artistic sensibility? Was a difference between pure works of art and artistic objects perceived, or did medieval aesthetics operate more like a continuum than a divide?

Science and Technology

Lecture 33

We see—not surprisingly—the greatest attention and innovation occurring in the area of food cultivation and preparation, as sustenance is perhaps the most basic of human needs. But as we move into the High Middle Ages, we begin to see a real growth—for the first time since the end of the Roman Empire—in urban life and a corresponding expansion of people specializing in trades and crafts that were not necessarily directly linked to the production of food.

Over the course of the Middle Ages, there were significant developments in science and technology. As was the case with medicine, the medieval world lagged a bit behind the Byzantine and Islamic worlds when it came to science and technology. By far its most significant developments were in areas crucial for survival: food, clothing, and shelter. The population was 90 percent rural, so changes in agriculture were of huge significance.

While some scholars talk of an agricultural revolution in the 10th century, most now think this significant increase in food production resulted from technologies that had been developing for some time. Heavy, wheeled plows made the planting process much more efficient. A new kind of horse collar—first used near present-day Germany in the late 8th or early 9th century—and greater use of horseshoes meant that horses, which were easier to care for and control than oxen, could be put to the plow. Over time, farms moved from a two-field to a three-field system, allowing the third field to lie fallow. Peasants also discovered the benefits of rotating crops. Usually built along rivers, mills took advantage of water power to grind grain into flour that could then be baked or otherwise transformed into foodstuffs.

Clothing production also saw important advances as the Middle Ages progressed, from more efficient technologies to organizations such as guilds to protect the craftsmen. In the 1100s, a new loom, with foot treadles, made weaving more efficient and comfortable. After weaving, cloth was fulled to shrink loose threads and achieve uniform consistency. This process was

long, laborious, and noisome, involving chemically potent components such as urine (human and animal) and a type of clay called fullers' earth. Dyers needed to be part chemist, part botanist, and part laboratory technician to impart color to the cloth.

After food and clothing, shelter is the next most important component in survival. Although surviving medieval structures are mostly stone, the most abundant building material was wood. Although nails did exist, they were used infrequently, so medieval builders developed wood joints such as the mortise and tenon and the lap joint. The construction of cathedrals might take centuries and would require the skilled labor of thousands of workers.

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Besides food, clothing, and shelter, transportation advances were fundamental to the growth and shape of the medieval world. The most common way to travel was overland and on foot. Improvements to the equipment used for horse travel and wheeled conveyance helped bring distant communities in contact with one another. Although it could be dangerous, travel by water was in fact the fastest way to move. Advances in ship construction brought once far-flung and exotic locales within reach.

Warfare, it seems, affected most of the population of the medieval world at one time or another. Advances in weaponry and defense contributed to the ways in which the medieval world shaped and allied itself. ■

Suggested Reading

Glick, Livesey, and Wallis, *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine*.

White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*.

Questions to Consider

1. What medieval inventions or technological innovations seemed to have the widest impact on the societies of the Middle Ages?

2. How did literary representations of mechanical marvels reflect real developments in medieval technology, and in what respect did they influence particular inventions and innovations?

Weapons and Warfare

Lecture 34

That warfare was an omnipresent fact of life in the medieval world should come as a surprise to no one. … The reasons for waging war and the entities that did so, however—from countries declaring war on one another to individuals skirmishing with their neighbors—varied immensely throughout the period.

War was a dominant aspect of medieval life; even those not directly involved in a conflict might be caught up in fighting due to association with one of the parties or an accident of geography. For a time, many scholars viewed medieval warfare as a haphazard enterprise that involved little in the way of long-range planning or military theory. In fact, evidence suggests a longstanding tradition of military theory that reached back into the Roman period and Vegetius's text *De re militari* (*On Military Matters*).

Broadly speaking, there were three types of medieval warfare: land combat, siege of a castle or fortress, and naval warfare. When it came to armed conflict between two groups of soldiers, actual fighting was usually a last resort, although the numerous recorded conflicts throughout the Middle Ages would seem to suggest otherwise. Often one party engaged in raiding, or *chévauchée*, a tactic designed to weaken the enemy's resources. Pitched battles might include a variety of personnel, from foot soldiers to archers to mounted knights. Although some battles were little more than free-for-alls, several major armed conflicts in the medieval world were decided by shrewd military strategy and tactics.

Siege warfare was much longer and more involved than pitched battle, as both sides might refrain from fighting while waiting for the supplies of one or the other to run out. Starving the opposition was often the most successful tactic in siege warfare, as was convincing the opposition of the abundance of one's own resources. Special equipment such as siege towers, ladders, catapults, and trebuchets were necessary to mount an attack on a castle,

fortress, or walled city. Those within the structure used ingenious methods to repel invaders.

Naval warfare was the least common form of fighting in the medieval world. Until about the 13th century, the sea was most commonly used to move military personnel around; battles, when they did happen, resembled pitched battles on land, with two boats side by side acting as the battlefield. In the 1400s, new technology—including gunpowder—changed conflict at sea so that it came more to resemble naval warfare as we know it today.

Medieval developments in military technology and weapons would profoundly alter the way war was waged. Without question, the single most important development was the stirrup, developed in the 8th century. It made mounted cavalry much more efficient and deadly. For most of the period, the armed, helmed, and mounted knight on horseback was one of the most formidable weapons in the military arsenal. The longbow played a significant role in English victories during the Hundred Years' War between France and England at the battles of Crécy, Poitiers, and Agincourt. By the end of the Middle Ages, gunpowder and long-range cannons combined to render knights on horseback almost obsolete. Germ warfare, long considered a modern weapon, was perhaps invented at the Siege of Caffa in 1348, when attackers lobbed plague-infested bodies into the fortress.

For most of the period, the armed, helmed, and mounted knight on horseback was one of the most formidable weapons in the military arsenal.

The main place where medieval military training took place was the tournament ground. Tournaments initially served a practical function in that they kept nobles in fighting form while providing an outlet for aggressive energy and entertainment for others. By the end of the medieval period, tournaments were almost solely for entertainment, rather than training. In the late Middle Ages, a knight might have two sets of equipment—one for actual fighting, one for tournaments. Tournaments were idealized in and popularized by many medieval romances, so by the end of the period, nobles hosted tournaments deliberately modeled

after the stories of King Arthur and the like, further removing them from reality and locating them in the realm of entertainment. ■

Suggested Reading

Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*.

Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider

1. How might the mind-set and worldview of a medieval man-at-arms have differed from that of the modern soldier?

2. What were the most important developments in medieval military strategy and technology over the course of the period?

Revolts, Uprisings, and Wars

Lecture 35

The Hundred Years' War is important for our understanding of certain aspects of the medieval world in part due to the development of new kinds of weapons, battle tactics, and patterns of taxation—all things that fostered great change in the three-estates model of medieval society.

In the late Middle Ages, a series of revolts, uprisings, and wars transformed the medieval world in new and unexpected ways. Perhaps the longest-lasting of these events—both in duration and impact—was the Hundred Years' War. This conflict between England and France was actually a series of conflicts rather than a single, sustained engagement, and it lasted more than 100 years—from approximately 1337 to 1453.

When William of Normandy conquered England in 1066, nobles now owned lands on both sides of the English Channel. To whom should they do homage—to the king of England or France? Furthermore, this technically made the king of England vassal to the king of France, a situation intolerable to the English. The situation was exacerbated by the marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine to King Henry II of England in the 12th century. Their marriage brought the French duchy of Aquitaine under English control, a blow to French territorial interests.

To break the will of the French, King Edward III of England employed *chévauchée*. English raiding parties burned and slaughtered their way through the French countryside, avoiding any formal, pitched battles and demoralizing the French. The English also achieved considerable success after developing some advanced weaponry, particularly the Welsh longbow. To pay for the war, monarchs levied kingdom-wide taxes, sometimes more than once in a single year, and largely abandoned the chivalric ideal of vassals giving military service in favor of a paid army.

During the duration of the Hundred Years' War, smaller revolts in France, England, and Italy further strained the power structures of medieval society.

The Jacquerie uprising occurred in France in 1358, in and around Paris. The English captured the French king after the Battle of Poitiers, encouraging French peasants to overturn a system that kept them at the bottom of the social order. Within Paris, the uprising was mainly the merchants, led by Etienne Marcel, against the royals and government. In the countryside, peasants rose up against nobles, slaughtering many of them and sacking their estates. Although the revolt was quickly put down, the status quo of absolute royal power was no longer viable, and change was needed.

Around the same time, across the English Channel, the seeds of a similar uprising were sown. After the first major wave of the plague swept through Europe, the surviving peasants found their labor in high demand. To curb the movement of peasants and a steep climb in wages, Parliament passed the Statute of Laborers in 1351, freezing wages at preplague levels and tying peasants to their manors. In addition, the English king levied taxes to help pay for the war with France in 1377, 1379, and 1380. In 1381, a general uprising began with attacks on royal tax collectors and soon became more widespread and violent. Although called the Peasants' Revolt, it involved a large proportion of the population who could more accurately be called merchant class. Although the revolt was finally put down by King Richard II, it was clear that old policies derived from the three-estates model no longer served medieval society.

A similar situation began in Italy in 1378, but unlike the Peasants' Revolt, the source of the discord was in an urban center—Florence. Due to postplague depopulation, many artisans were compelled to work directly for merchants rather than as independent artisans-cum-merchants, a dissatisfying situation for most craftspeople. This issue was felt particularly strongly in the cloth industry, whose workers, the Ciompi, were all governed by a single guild, the Arte dell Lana, which allowed only cloth merchants to be members. This guild also lengthened apprenticeships and refused to allow those in related industries—such as dyers, fullers, and weavers—to have their own guilds. In 1378, the Ciompi uprising ousted the sitting Florentine government and placed a wool-carder in charge of the city. Within a few short years, infighting between the various Ciompi factions brought the rebellion to an end, although the impact would be felt long after.

No sooner had the Hundred Years' War between France and England come to an end than a new, internal conflict broke out in England that led to a new royal house coming to power—ushering out, in the view of many historians, the medieval period and bringing in the early modern. The roots of the Wars of the Roses are to be found in the Hundred Years' War. After his victory at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, King Henry V of England took, among other things, the French princess Catherine for his bride. Henry V died when his infant son, Henry VI, was only nine months old, thus throwing English government into turmoil. Adding to this difficulty, as an adult Henry VI had no real inclination to be king and had inherited the insanity of his grandfather, the French king. During two of his bouts of insanity, Henry's cousin, the duke of York, was named protector of the realm and served as regent, a situation that many English people would have liked to become permanent. This conflict—between the royal houses of Lancaster and York—would come in later years to be known as the Wars of the Roses, as each house supposedly had either a white or red rose as its emblem. After 32 years, the conflict ended when Henry Tudor, a distant Lancaster cousin with an equally distant claim to the throne, defeated the Yorkist king, Richard III, at the Battle of Bosworth field and took as his bride Elizabeth of York. ■

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Suggested Reading

Allmand, *The Hundred Years' War*.

Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses*.

Questions to Consider

1. What factors combined to produce so many revolts, wars, and uprisings in the later Middle Ages in multiple geographic locales and between so many varied groups of people?

2. How might European society have developed differently if the lower classes had not revolted against their superiors in England, France, and Italy?

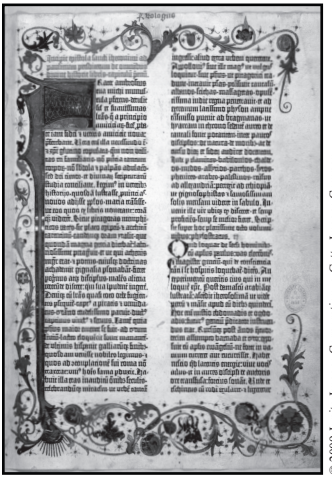
Toward the Early Modern Period

Lecture 36

The term "Renaissance," which literally means "rebirth," was long used by those who saw the 16th century as a period of enlightenment and learning after the long, dark, and uninteresting period known as the Middle Ages. … Instead of a gap or divide between the medieval and early modern period, I tend to see bridges that connect the two in important ways.

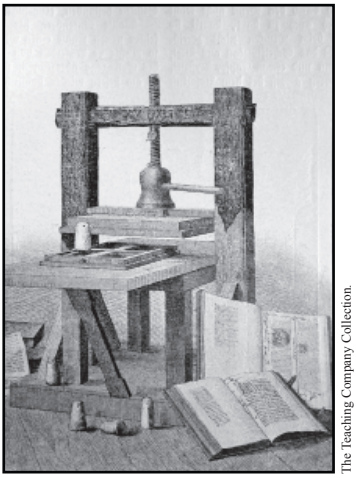
The Renaissance, spanning roughly from the late 15th to the 17th century, has been simplistically defined in terms of its difference from—and by extension, its superiority over—the medieval period. Advances in artistic technique and production, a rediscovery of lost Classical texts, a new valuation of the individual, and dramatic religious reforms are all considered the hallmarks of the Renaissance. Yet all of these developments have their root in the Middle Ages. Where once scholars spoke of the differences between the periods, we now tend to see much greater continuity of ideals and values as the medieval world slowly transformed into something new.

One of the defining elements of the early modern period, or Renaissance, was the explosion of interest in Classical texts that had been lost or unknown to the Middle Ages. In fact, the gathering of manuscripts by Charlemagne and Alfred the Great laid the foundation for the rediscovery of works of classical antiquity. In addition, trade relations with the east—particularly through the Italian city-states—brought other undiscovered or lost texts into the European orbit.



The Gutenberg Bible was the first book printed in the west using movable type. About 40 copies survive.

The exponential increase in literary production during the early modern period was made possible by the development of moveable type and the printing press in combination with paper, which was much easier to produce than parchment or vellum. Although probably not the inventor of moveable type, Johannes Gutenberg was responsible for its initial and eventual mainstream use in the medieval world. Printers such as England's William Caxton exploited the printing press to great advantage while still participating in the luxury manuscript book trade, which points to the continuity between the medieval and early modern.



The Teaching Company Collection.

Johannes Gutenberg most likely did not invent movable type, but his printing press brought the innovation to the mainstream of medieval printmaking.

Although the Protestant Reformation is often described as beginning when German religious reformer Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of a church in Wittenburg in 1517, its origins actually lie in the medieval world. In England in the 14th century, reformers such as John Wycliff, associated with the Lollard movement, argued for a greater emphasis on the individual's relationship with God and vernacular translations of the Bible. Wycliff's ideas greatly influenced Czech theologian John Huss, who took up the cause of church reform in the late 14th century. Although Huss was eventually excommunicated and executed for his efforts, his ideas about religion lit a spark in the imagination of the medieval world.

The major literary and artistic developments of the early modern period can be traced to 14th-century Italy, which produced a plethora of writers and artists. A new, more realistic style of artistic representation was introduced in Italy by the great artist Cimabue and his pupil, Giotto; their influence on other painters and sculptors such as Donatello, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michaelangelo, would be profound. From a literary perspective, the early modern period arguably began with late 13th- and early 14th-century Italian poets such as Dante and Petrarch. In England in the 14th century, Chaucer's

Canterbury Tales followed Dante's lead by using the vernacular—English—rather than the Latin of scholars and monks and in turning traditional character types into individuals.

The early modern period is often known as the age of exploration, as nations such as England and Spain sent explorers to the New World. Such expeditions were made possible in part by advances in naval engineering developed during the medieval period. The impulse to look west began as early as the year 1000 with Leif Erikson's journey to North America. The explosion in journeys of discovery was fueled in part by demand for natural resources unavailable in most of Western Europe, a taste for which had begun with the exotic spices and goods that trickled west with the advent of the Crusades.

William Caxton exploited the printing press to great advantage while still participating in the luxury manuscript book trade, which points to the continuity between the medieval and early modern.

Medieval people were more like us than they were different. We would do well to remember the medieval world and its people—their world gave rise to ours, and in our most sacred institutions of government, houses of worship, and social ideals, the shadow of the medieval looms large. ■

Suggested Reading

Füssel, *Gutenberg and the Impact of Printing*.

Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*.

Questions to Consider

1. How useful is a term like "Renaissance" in describing what most scholars now call the early modern period? What medieval institutions, ideas, and inventions gave rise to the early modern?

2. Although most scholars argue for assuming a greater degree of continuity between the medieval and the early modern worlds than was once the case, there are some striking discontinuities. What produced these notable breaks with tradition?

Timeline

285–305	Reign of Emperor Diocletian.
312	The Battle of Milvian Bridge; Constantine becomes emperor of the Western Roman Empire.
313	Constantine issues the Edict of Toleration.
325	Council of Nicaea, presided over by Constantine.
378	Battle of Adrianople.
410	Goths sack Rome; Alaric becomes emperor.
c. 449	Anglo-Saxons, led by brothers Hengest and Horsa, invade Britain.
c. 480	Clovis becomes king of the Franks.
c. 480–547	Life of Saint Benedict of Nursia.
c. 500	Probable date of the Battle of Mount Badon, at which the legendary King Arthur defeated the invading Anglo-Saxons, curbing their incursion into Britain for a time.
531	Franks attack and slaughter the Thuringians.

622 ..... Muhammad makes the Hejira, fleeing from Mecca to Medina; Muslim calendar begins.

632 ..... Death of Muhammad.

664 ..... Synod of Whitby reconciles the date of Easter between the Celtic and Roman Churches.

687 ..... Frankish mayor of the palace, Pepin of Heristal, defeats the Neustrians, consolidating power through his domination of Burgundy and the surrounding region.

711 ..... Arab conquest of Spain begins.

731 ..... Venerable Bede completes his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

597 ..... Augustine of Canterbury heads the Christian mission to the Anglo-Saxons.

789 ..... Vikings sack Lindisfarne Abbey.

800 ..... Charlemagne crowned emperor by Pope Leo III on Christmas.

814 ..... Death of Charlemagne.

843 ..... Treaty of Verdun divides and dissipates the power of the Carolingian Empire.

871 ..... Alfred the Great crowned king of Wessex.

874..... Settlement of Iceland begins.

899..... Death of Alfred the Great.

c. 900s ..... Composition of the *Exeter Book*.

911–919..... Carolingian dynasty ends; rise of the Ottonian dynasty.

930..... First meeting of the Althing, arguably the medieval world's first parliament, on the plain at Thingvellir, Iceland.

991..... The Battle of Maldon.

c. 1000..... Composition of *Beowulf*.

1000..... Leif Erikson reaches North America.

1013..... Swein Forkbeard, king of Denmark, declares himself king of England.

1042..... Edward the Confessor crowned king of England.

1054..... Great Schism between Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Catholic) Churches.

1066..... William of Normandy conquers England.

1095..... Pope Urban II preaches the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont.

1098..... Robert Molesme founds Cistercian monastic order.

1099..... Western forces capture Jerusalem.

1136/38..... Geoffrey of Monmouth composes his *History of the Kings of Britain*.

c. 1140..... Beginning of gothic architecture.

1170..... Thomas à Becket killed by four knights of King Henry II in Canterbury Cathedral.

1187..... Battle of Hattin; Jerusalem falls to Saladin and his army.

1204..... Sack of Constantinople by Crusaders.

1215..... King John of England compelled to sign the Magna Carta; Fourth Lateran Council.

1290..... Expulsion of the Jews from England.

1291..... Fall of Acre, the last Western-controlled outpost in the Holy Land.

1309..... Pope Clement V takes up residence in Avignon, beginning the Babylonian Captivity.

c. 1337..... Hundred Years' War begins.

1348..... Plague begins to ravage Europe.

1351..... English Parliament enacts the Statute of Laborers, freezing wages at preplague levels and limiting peasant movement.

1358..... Jacquerie breaks out in Paris.

1377..... Papacy returns to Rome.

1378..... Ciompi Revolt in Italy.

c. 1380s ..... Geoffrey Chaucer composes *The Canterbury Tales*.

1381..... Peasants' Revolt in England.

1415..... English defeat the French at the Battle of Agincourt.

c. 1450..... Johannes Gutenberg introduces moveable type and printing to Europe.

c. 1455..... The Wars of the Roses begin.

1476..... William Caxton sets up his printing business in England.

1485..... Defeat of King Richard III of England at the Battle of Bosworth Field; Henry Tudor crowned Henry VII of England.

Glossary

Althing: Arguably the medieval world's first parliament. It convened on the plain of Thingvellir, in Iceland, in the year 930.

Arianism: Heretical movement popular during the early Middle Ages that held that although Jesus Christ was divine, he could not be as divine as God the Father because he had been human for a time. Stamping out Arianism was one of the major concerns of early church councils.

Articella: Literally, "little thing"; refers to the standard texts used for study at the medical schools of Bologna, Salerno, and later, Montpellier.

assarting: Process by which forest land was cleared and brought under the plow.

Babylonian Captivity: Period during the 14th century when the pope resided in Avignon, rather than in Rome, conveying the sense that the papacy in some sense was held captive during this period. It alludes to the captivity of the Hebrews by the Babylonians during the 6th century B.C.

Black Death: A 16th-century term describing the waves of plague—bubonic, pneumonic, and septicemic—that devastated the population of Europe starting in 1348. At least a third and perhaps as much as half the population of medieval world succumbed to the plague, with episodes recurring once a generation or so well into the 18th century.

Byzantium: Political entity that developed from the eastern half of the Roman Empire; also at times the name of the capital city, which was rebuilt and renamed Constantinople in the early 4th century (c. 330) and was later called Istanbul, it's original Turkish name. Compared with the West, the Byzantine Empire was more stable and advanced for much of the Middle Ages.

Catharism (a.k.a. **Albigensian heresy**): Heresy found primarily in the south of France in the 12th and 13th centuries. Cathars were dualists—holding that ideas such as good and evil, God and the Devil needed to be held in balance—and they refused to acknowledge as significant the moment of the Crucifixion. They were largely wiped out during the Albigensian Crusade of 1208.

chévauchée: Military strategy employed with great frequency during the Hundred Years' War, particularly by Edward, the Black Prince, heir to the throne of England. It involved pillaging, setting fire to, and generally laying waste the territories—including farmland and homesteads of innocent peasants—under control of one's enemies.

Ciompi: Florentine clothworkers who revolted against guild restrictions in 1378 and seized control of the government of Florence, maintaining it until 1382.

comitatus: The most important element of Germanic society, a band of loyal retainers, or thanes—usually young men—who acted as the personal war band of the leader or king.

danse macabre: Literally, "dance of death"; artistic motif, often depicting a skeleton engaged in the act of leading people into the afterlife, that became a common element of literature and art in the wake of the Black Death.

Drang nach Osten: Saxon "push to the east" that began in the 10th century, in which commoners and lords were encouraged to move east and settle on unoccupied lands, thereby enlarging German borders.

estates satire: Tradition of writing in which representatives of the three orders or three estates of medieval society were caricatured. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is an example.

feudalism: Much-disputed but still useful term to describe medieval social structure and relations. Although the term was first used in the 16th century, it derives from the Latin word feudum, which in the Middle Ages referred to a "fief," or piece of land that a lord might bestow on a vassal in return for

service and loyalty. A feudal society may be described as hierarchical and dependent on bonds of loyalty and service for its organization.

flagellant movement: Self-penitential movement in which participants whipped themselves, punishing the flesh to perfect the spirit. The practice became widespread and public during the Black Death, when groups of flagellants would travel from town to town, publicly whipping themselves in the belief that the plague was a punishment from God and their behavior might help atone for whatever sins humankind had committed that resulted in the plague.

Germania: Territory to the north and west of the Roman Empire—beyond the Rhine and Danube rivers—populated by Germanic tribes who were not members of the Roman world.

Gregorian chant: Although named for Pope Gregory the Great, this monophonic religious plainchant was popularized by the Emperor Charlemagne as part of his move to reform religion and standardize church services.

gothic: Style of architecture found primarily in churches and cathedrals that came into use in the 12th century near Paris. Its signature elements included the pointed arch, high vaulted ceilings, and flying buttresses.

Hejira: Flight of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in the year 622 to escape persecution. This event marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

Hundred Years' War: Conflict between England and France over the right to the French throne that continued from about 1337 to 1453, with occasional truces and cessations in fighting.

Jacquerie: Rebellion by French peasants against nobles that erupted in 1358. Angry at being asked to rebuild noble houses destroyed in the Hundred Years' War, the participants joined with another rebellious group, led by Étienne Marcel, who had seized control of Paris. The rebellion was relatively quickly put down.

Lollard: Followers of John Wycliff, whose heretical teachings were of great concern to clerical leaders in England in the 14th and 15th centuries. Lollards (or Wycliffites) believed that every individual should have access to the Word of God and that the use of priests as mediators and explicators of the Bible was unnecessary. They thus believed strongly that the Bible should be translated into English, something to which church leaders were violently opposed.

mark of cadency: Distinguishing mark on a coat of arms that identifies the bearer as junior member of that particular family.

mayor of the palace: Political office of great importance during the Merovingian dynasty of the 7th and 8th centuries. Eventually the position became hereditary, and in 751 Pippin III took the crown from the Merovingians, founding the Carolingian dynasty. The son of Pippin III was Charlemagne, king of the Franks and later Holy Roman Emperor.

motte and bailey: Style of castle building favored by conquerors—such as William of Normandy—to establish a defensive position in occupied territory. The motte is a raised earthen mound surrounded by a ditch, for added security; the bailey is a courtyard below and in front of the motte where most of the daily life of the castle took place.

ofermod: Old English word meaning "excessive pride" or "excessive assurance/self-confidence." In the poem about the Battle of Maldon, which took place in 991, the poet tells the reader that it is because of his ofermod that the English leader Byrthnoth makes a fatal tactical mistake, leading to the defeat of the English forces.

Pelagianism: Heresy based on the teachings of a 5th-century monk named Pelagius. Pelagianism held that one could earn one's way into heaven by doing good works, a position deemed heretical by church officials, who upheld the teaching that only God's grace determined whether one would go to heaven or not.

quadrivium: Four of the seven liberal arts, consisting of arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music.

Reconquista: Series of efforts, beginning in the 8th century, to re-Christianize those territories in the Iberian Peninsula that were under Muslim rule. With the conquest of Granada in 1492, the Reconquista was complete.

Romanesque: Style of architecture marked primarily by the use of the rounded arch and barrel vaulting; this style preceded the gothic.

romanitas: Literally, "romanness"; as the Roman Empire expanded, its military and citizens sought to recreate Rome wherever they went, attempting to maintain an essential quality of romanness.

three estates (a.k.a. **three orders**): Ideal division of medieval society into three groups: those who fought (the nobles), those who prayed (the clergy), and those who worked (the peasants). Although a tripartite division, the estates were in no way equivalent. The nobles and the clergy—most of whom also came from the noble class—made up about 10 percent of the population, while the workers—everyone else—comprised 90 percent.

trebuchet: A military weapon very similar to a catapult.

trivium: Three of the seven liberal arts, consisting of grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

Wars of the Roses: A series of dynastic conflicts beginning in 1455, fought between factions loyal to the English houses of Lancaster and York. The conflict lasted until 1485, when the Lancastrian Henry Tudor, who had only a very distant claim to the throne, defeated the Yorkist King Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth field. The new Henry VII then married the only surviving Yorkist, his cousin Elizabeth, thereby cementing his claim to the throne and beginning the Tudor dynasty.

Biographical Notes

Alfred the Great (848–849): The most unlikely of kings and the only English monarch to bear the title "the Great," Alfred was the fifth son of the Anglo-Saxon king of Wessex and came to the throne in 871 after the deaths of his older brothers, most of whom met their ends in armed conflicts with the invading Vikings. Famously forced to flee into hiding in the Atheleny marshes, Alfred regrouped and defeated the Vikings, becoming king of the Anglo-Saxons and setting the stage for his grandson to eventually become the first king of England. During his reign, Alfred instituted defensive measures such as the Burghal Hidage and the first English navy, and he promoted education and the church.

Arthur (c. 500?): The legendary ruler of Britain, most likely based on a real historic personage who rallied the Britons against the invading Anglo-Saxons in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. Probably never called king in his own lifetime, he was most likely a Romanized Briton who came to power when the Roman legions withdrew after the sack of Rome in 410. The fact that the origins of this hero are lost in the mists of time is likely why he has become such a popular figure of legend; his story has lent itself to appropriation and elaboration by any number of groups and peoples throughout the last 1,500 years.

Bede, the Venerable (672–735): Were it not for the Venerable Bede's masterpiece, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English Language*, completed in 731, we would know next to nothing about pre-8th-century England. A monk who spent most of his life in the monastery of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow in Northumbria, Bede also composed many other religious tracts that had great influence on the development of Christianity in early England.

Charlemagne (a.k.a. **Charles the Great**; 747–814): A scion of the Carolingian dynasty, Charlemagne became king of the Franks in 768. A conqueror, state builder, defender of the faith, and promoter of education and the arts, he is regarded as the instigator of the Carolingian Renaissance, a period in the 8th and

9th centuries that saw an unprecedented flowering of scholarship and the arts. On Christmas Day in the year 800, he was crowned emperor by Pope Leo III, an act that would give rise to the idea of the Holy Roman Empire, which would remain potent in the figurative sense long after it had ceased to have any real relevance. After his death, Charlemagne's kingdom was divided among his heirs after much squabbling; 60 years after his death, the power of the Carolingian empire he had built had almost completely disappeared.

Chaucer, Geoffrey (c. 1343–1400): English poet best known for *The Canterbury Tales*, written in the 1380s. This text provides a unique view of the various strata and occupations of medieval society, from highest to lowest. Although writing in an established genre known as estates satire, Chaucer made brilliant innovations to produce a kind of writing that was in many respects utterly new. Associated with the household of John of Gaunt, the wealthiest man in England and one of the sons of King Edward III, Chaucer was an example of the kind of upward mobility available to the middle classes in the wake of the Black Death.

Constantine (c. 272–337): Emperor of Rome from 306 until his death, Constantine the Great is perhaps most important in terms of the development of the medieval world for his Edict of Toleration, issued in 313, which protected Christians from persecution. There is some debate as to whether or not Constantine himself was a Christian, but his protection of Christians paved the way for Christianity to go from the most persecuted religion of the empire to the most favored within the span of just a century.

Gutenberg, Johannes (c. 1398–1468): Goldsmith who is credited with introducing the printing press and moveable type to the medieval world. The spread of printing helped pave the way for the explosion of learning and exchange of knowledge that would mark the early modern period.

Henry II (a.k.a. **Henry Plantagenet**; r. 1154–1189): King of England who, with his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine, enlarged England's continental holdings to the largest they would ever be. His reign was marked by a dispute with his former friend, Thomas à Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, that resulted in Becket's murder at the hands of four of Henry's knights. Toward

the end of his reign, he was embroiled in numerous disputes with his wife and sons, particularly Richard the Lionheart and John.

John (1167–1216): King of England. As a younger son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, John was initially given the nickname "Lackland," as it seemed likely that he stood to inherit very little in the way of estates or titles. After succeeding his brother Richard as king in 1199, John's rule became famously inept. He lost almost all the territories his father had amassed and was forced to sign the Magna Carta in 1215 by 25 of his most powerful barons.

Justinian (c. 482–565): In 597, Justinian ascended to the throne of the eastern half of the former Roman Empire—also known as the Byzantine Empire—and sought to restore the unity of Rome by reclaiming territories that had been lost. He also was a great promoter of the arts, and during his reign the magnificent Hagia Sophia was constructed. The most important legacy of Justinian's rule, however, was his legal code, known as the Justinian Code or the Corpus Juris Civilis, which clarified and affirmed the Roman legal code and which remains a foundational element of many law codes today.

Muhammad (570–632): Revered as the founder of Islam and regarded as the prophet of God by its followers. Around the age of 40, he began conveying messages given to him by God while he meditated in a cave outside the city of Mecca. Although he gathered many followers, he was also subject to persecution by the tribal leaders of the area, who saw him as a threat to their power. In 622, he made the Hejira, or flight, to the city of Medina. Eventually, the various tribes of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond united as a single Muslim polity; this unity allowed a flourishing of education, science, and the arts in the Islamic world that far exceeded what was happening contemporaneously in the medieval world. Islam would play a vital role in influencing and shaping European society throughout the Middle Ages.

Saladin (1138–1193): One of the most remarkable figures in history, Saladin was a Kurdish Muslim who led the resistance against Crusaders in the Holy Land. His honorable behavior toward those he captured and defeated, his scholasticism, and his attempts to work with Frankish leaders to find peaceable solutions in the Levant earned him the respect of his enemies, and

he became a central figure (along with Richard I of England, the Lionheart) in medieval stories of chivalry and knightly activity. After his capture of Jerusalem in 1187, he famously freed most of those held captive in the city and allowed the Jewish population to resettle there. He died of fever in Damascus.

Urban II (c. 1042–1099): A monk and reformer, Urban became Pope in 1088. He is best known for preaching the First Crusade in 1095 at the Council of Clermont. The leaders of the first units of Crusaders answered directly to him, and it was forbidden for any to "take the cross" and go on Crusade without his approval. He died in July 1099, two weeks after Crusaders had captured the city of Jerusalem but before news of the victory could reach him.

William of Normandy (a.k.a. **William the Conqueror** or **William Bastard**; c. 1027–1087): King of England. Cousin to the last Anglo-Saxon king, Edward the Confessor, who was childless. When Edward died in 1066, the king's brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson, claimed the throne; William maintained that Edward had promised the crown to him and so invaded England in October 1066. He defeated Harold's troops and killed Harold at the Battle of Hastings. Within a few short years, English society was profoundly and radically transformed by Norman rule.

Wycliffe, John (c. 1330–1384): English scholar and theologian who is considered one of the leaders of the religious movement known as Lollardy. Many of Wycliffe's teachings—including that the Bible should be translated into English and that the intercessory efforts of a priest were not necessary for individual salvation—were condemned by church officials, who saw his beliefs as threatening to their power and status. In his argument that the church should not own property and his other beliefs, he anticipated the coming Protestant Reformation.

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