

The High Middle Ages, Part I

During the 500 years from the collapse of the Roman Empire to the year A.D. 1000, life in Western Europe was less than perfect. With no powerful government in place, the people and powers of the West faced constant challenges from invasion, wars, civil wars, food shortages, and disease.

However, around the year 1000, and for the next 300 years to follow, a dramatic series of changes came to the West. There was a brilliant recovery from the semi-barbarism that had held Western Europe in its clutches for centuries. Life in the West not only improved, it improved substantially. These centuries—from 1000 to nearly 1300—mark the rise of the High Middle Ages.

How did this happen? And what were the changes that allowed Western Europe to turn a corner to a better world? By 1000, many of the Germanic tribes which had proven so destructive in the West had settled down. There were fewer invasions and internal civil wars, bringing greater stability and less chaos.

The nature of destructive wars and invasions changed. Most of the medieval conflicts consisted of lengthy sieges of heavily fortified castles and other fortresses. Typically, no more than a few dozen men were needed to protect a castle, leading to less direct violence and bloodshed. Even field conflicts involving knights were limited skirmishes with minimal loss of life. This allowed more young people to survive, which resulted in a population rise in the West.

This population explosion is an important trend in the West of the 11th and 12th centuries. Other reasons for the population increase include the fact that between the 10th and 14th centuries, Europe was not hit by a major plague or killing disease.

Also, the period between 1000 and 1200 experienced a better weather pattern. This meant a significant long-term warming trend, which brought milder winters and drier summers and allowed for an increase in agricultural production, resulting in healthier people, less disease, and better lifestyles.

The population changes in the West were significantly greater. For example, between 950 and 1350, England's population increased from one million to three million. Overall, Europe's population doubled

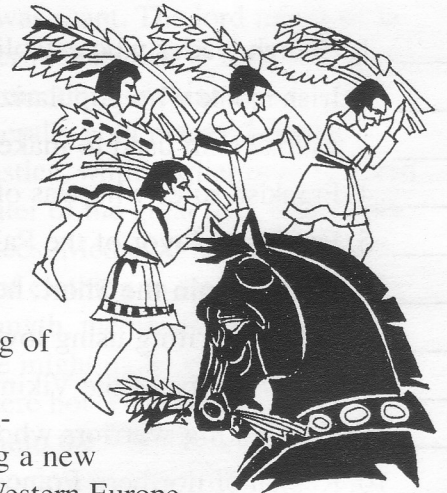
in the four centuries beginning in A.D. 950.

This growth in population caused some ecological problems for Europe, however. As the population grew, the old balance between the land and the populace was upset: farming was expanded into completely new regions; forests were chopped down and cleared; and swamps were drained for agriculture.

As Europe's population grew by leaps and bounds, the size of feudal holdings also increased. The land owned by a lord typically expanded in size during the High Middle Ages.

The changes that Europe experienced during the High Middle Ages resulted in a decline in slavery. Buying and selling slaves had been an important trade activity during the Early Middle Ages. However, slavery barely survived the High Middle Ages. With the population boom, there was no manpower shortage in the West, resulting in less slavery.

Also, changes in farming and the use of the horse reduced the need for slavery. The High Middle Ages witnessed the adoption of the padded horsecollar, the tandem harness, and the nailed horseshoe—all of which improved the work capacity of the horse by four times. When feeding a horse became cheaper than feeding four slaves, and a horse could produce more work, the result was an inevitable lessening of reliance on human labor. Such innovations were bringing a new quality of life to Western Europe. And more changes were on the way.



Review and Write

How did life in western Europe improve greatly between 1000 and 1300?

The High Middle Ages, Part II

As we have seen, the High Middle Ages brought positive change to Western Europe during the centuries between 1000 and 1300. These changes included advancements in farming methods, an increased urbanization, and new technologies.

Perhaps nowhere else did medieval life change more dramatically than in farming. The heavy-wheeled plow was invented which cut deeper furrows in fields and eliminated the need for cross-plowing, going several times over a field before the soil was broken up enough to plant a crop.

In addition, the three-field system of agriculture was adopted. In earlier centuries, medieval farms used a two-field system. Each spring, half the fields were planted with a grain crop and the other half lay fallow, or lay idle. Under the new system, fields were carved into thirds, with one-third planted with a winter crop of wheat, rye, or barley; another third sown with spring crops of grain, peas, or beans; and only a third left fallow. Such changes brought more abundance from medieval farming.

Industrial changes also occurred during the High Middle Ages. The modern factory did not exist during this period, but other mechanization did. For example, there was a dramatic increase in water and wind-powered mills. Where slaves had once been used to grind grain, the High Middle Ages introduced the water mill. Most such mills provided services for about 50 families, grinding grain, sawing lumber, beating cloth, and crushing ore.

Several significant inventions came into existence in Western Europe during the High Middle Ages. One such medieval invention was the crank, a simple device consisting of two shafts at right angles. This technology transformed up-and-down and backward-and-forward motion into circular motion. The crank allowed people to lift more with less strain. The spinning wheel was another important medieval technology. It allowed for the production of inexpensive thread and cloth. Such a tool gave those of the medieval period a greater access not only to clothing, but to additional items such as sheets, towels, and even underwear.

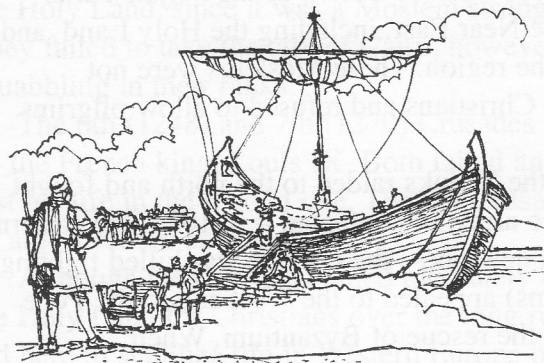
As the spinning wheel brought more cloth items to the medieval wardrobe, it also changed the nature of the material people wrote on. As clothing wore

out, the rags—mostly linen—allowed for the production of cheap paper, rather than vellum made from animal skins or expensive parchment. The result was cheaper books produced on paper.

Other items which revolutionized life in the Middle Ages were the mechanized clock (by the 1300s) and the button for clothing. By the 14th century, gunpowder had been introduced to Europe by way of China, which changed the nature of warfare and made the castle as a defensive tool obsolete.

Another trend of the period was the revival of urban life. Many towns and cities had declined or ceased to exist in the West during the Early Middle Ages. But by the 10th century, towns were back and large cities once again gained importance.

Such cities led to greater trade. This trade helped expand the economy of the High Middle Ages. Rather than just producing to survive, medieval people were now accumulating surpluses, which they sold to the East, including Constantinople and the Moslems.



In Italy, great trading cities grew and connected with the East. Leading the way were the city-states of Venice, Genoa, and Pisa. Such cities were filled with merchants, shippers, and traders who helped connect the West with the East.

Review and Write

After studying the changes brought to Europe between 1000 and 1300, make a list of what appear to be the three greatest changes, and explain why.

The Crusades, Part I

During the High Middle Ages, Christians from all over Europe expressed their faith in many ways. One spiritual act especially important to many of the followers of Christ was to make a trip to the land where Jesus had lived, walked, and spread his message during his ministry.

That place was known as the Holy Land. For hundreds of years, Christian travelers called pilgrims took an inspirational tour of the land of Palestine (today, the nation of Israel) to visit the sites spoken of in their New Testaments: the Garden of Gethsemane, the Sea of Galilee, and the site of the Holy sepulcher (the traditional site where Jesus was laid to rest after his crucifixion).

Until the 11th century, Christian Europeans had no trouble gaining access to the Holy Land, despite the presence of the Moslems who ruled there. Moslem governors had been more than happy to allow Christians into their lands to visit their holy places.

However, during the mid-11th century, a fanatical group of Moslems known as the Seljuk Turks invaded the Near East, including the Holy Land, and occupied the region. These Moslems were not friendly to Christians and refused to allow pilgrims to visit.

When the Seljuks raided to the north and fought a Byzantine army and defeated it in 1071, the eastern emperor (a new one—the old one was killed fighting the Moslems) appealed to the West and to the Pope to come to the rescue of Byzantium. When Constantinople itself was threatened, the Westerners considered responding.

After hearing stories of atrocities by the Moslems against Christians in the Near East, a Western pope named Urban II finally began to rally others to offer help. In 1095, he called Western Europeans to participate in a holy war against the Moslems.

This First Crusade led Christian rulers to commit their knights to fight to free the Holy Land once again. The word “Crusade” was taken from the term meaning “taking the Cross.” The knights who participated in this and other Crusades wore white cloth tunics over their armor, which bore the symbol of a red cross.

While many Europeans who went to fight did so for religious reasons, some had other motivations. A crusader became a privileged person. While away on a crusade, he did not have to pay taxes and his debts were cancelled temporarily. Others saw opportunities to gain new lands in Syria or Palestine for themselves. Italian merchants provided many ships to carry crusaders to the Holy Land, making huge profits for themselves.

Over a period of 200 years, there were eight distinct crusades and several smaller ventures. The First Crusade involved lords and knights from France, Germany, and southern Italy. This was the most successful of all the crusades. Approximately 3000 knights and 12,000 infantry helped to fight the Turkish Moslems. Ultimately these Christian warriors were able to win great victories, including capturing Jerusalem, the Holy City.

Once these crusading knights succeeded in defeating the Turks in Syria and Asia Minor, they created a feudal Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, which lasted from 1099 to 1187. A second crusade was called in the 1140s when the Turks were close to seeing to the fall of Jerusalem. This crusade was called by St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

Two European leaders—Louis VII and the Byzantine Emperor Conrad III—joined forces in 1147, and had many problems just getting their armies to the Near East. They never made it to Jerusalem and this crusade failed to even capture the city of Damascus from the Moslems. Other crusades lay ahead, however.

Review and Write

1. What were some of the primary reasons why the crusaders agreed to fight against the Moslems so far from home?
2. Why was the land of Palestine so important to the Christians of Europe?

With the failure of the 2nd Crusade, the Moslems continued to strike at the fringes of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem until they caused its fall in 1187. Led by a fanatical, yet brilliant, general named Saladin, the Moslem takeover of the Holy Land signalled the call for a third crusade.

This 3rd Crusade was led by three kings: Philip Augustus of France, Richard I (known as the Lionhearted) of England, and Frederick Barbarossa, Emperor of Germany. ("Barbarossa" was a reference to the king's red beard.) These three men led their armies into the crusade sometimes referred to as the Crusade of Kings.

Their alliance was to be an uneasy one. Along the way, Philip and Richard quarreled and the French king quit the crusade and returned home before ever reaching the Holy Land. Frederick Barbarossa drowned in a river before seeing a single Moslem opponent. Only Richard and his army fought Saladin.

Richard's forces fought fairly well and in 1191 succeeded in capturing the Moslem-controlled city of Acre, located along the eastern Mediterranean coast, north of Jerusalem. (At Acre, the Christian army used a huge catapult known as Bad Neighbor.) However, he did not succeed in taking Jerusalem. In the end, Richard had to be content with an agreement from Saladin which opened the Holy City to Christian pilgrims.

The crusades were not over. Saladin died in 1193. In 1198, a new pope, Innocent III, called for a 4th Crusade. This one went terribly wrong. Few knights volunteered to go on this crusade. Many of those who did arrived in Venice, the great port city on the eastern coast of Italy, needing passage to the Holy Land. The Venetian merchants, seeing an opportunity for great profit, charged the crusaders so much for the voyage that most of the knights could not afford the trip.

A deal was soon struck which completely violated the ideals of the crusade. The Venetians offered to give the knights passage only if they agreed to attack the

city of Zara first. Located on the opposite side of the Adriatic from Venice, Zara was Venice's rival in trade. The Christian knights agreed. The irony was that Zara was not a Moslem city, but a Christian one! Once Christian knights destroyed the Christian city of Zara, the Venetians urged them to attack the capital of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople, another Christian community. The knights attacked Constantinople on April 12, 1204. They looted the city and killed the emperor. Most of these knights never finished their journey to the Holy Land.

The crusaders established a new Latin Empire of Constantinople. This new kingdom did not see Byzantine rule again until 1261. This destruction by Western Christians resulted in a decline of the Eastern Empire. Byzantium would never be as powerful as it had been before the Christian attack.

This attack by Christians on Christians brought an end to any reasonable spirit for future crusades. The final four crusades accomplished very little. The 5th Crusade (1217-1221) was directed at Egypt, not the Holy Land, since it was a Moslem stronghold. They failed to take the city of Cairo, however, due to squabbling in their ranks.

The 6th (1248) and 7th (1270) Crusades were led by the French king, Louis IX. Both failed and Louis lost his life in the second one. The 8th Crusade was an abject failure as well.

Although the Crusades failed ultimately to secure the Holy Land for Christians over the long run, they did help to stabilize life in Western Europe by causing young knights to fight the Moslems or Eastern Christians rather than fight one another at home.



Knights en route to the Crusades