

Medieval Europe

An overview of a thousand years of history: 400 to 1450

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In this PowerPoint presentation, a sequence of slides forms an interactive map of Europe during the Middle Ages. It covers the period from the fall of the western Roman Empire in the fifth century to the time of the Italian Renaissance and the beginning of the European Age of Discovery, in the fifteenth century.

The interactive map is designed to give a clear overview of these thousand years of European history. More detailed information about Medieval Europe is given in the Timemaps units:

Medieval Europe I (400 to 1000 CE)

and

Medieval Europe II (1000 to 1450 CE).

There are two versions of this PowerPoint presentation, one with on-screen notes and one without. In both cases, these Notes can be used to provide further information.

Presentation Notes

Slide 1: 400 CE: In the late fourth century, the Roman Empire stands intact. Its economy remains strong.

- In the late fourth century, the **Roman Empire** stands intact. Its economy is still strong (note 1).
- The Roman Empire is now ruled by **two emperors**, one in the east and one in the west (note 2).
- **Christianity** is the official religion of the empire. The bishop of Rome is its leading figure (note 3).

Notes

1. The Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century CE

The Roman empire remains at almost its full extent. It is still very much a going concern.

A large horde of **Goths** crossed the Danube frontier in 378 and annihilated a Roman army. After devastating a large area of territory, they were given their own territory to settle. Although destructive, however, this disaster affected only a small part of the empire.

2. The division of the empire

There are currently two Roman emperors. One rules the eastern empire from the eastern capital, **Constantinople**, and one rules the western empire from his court at **Ravenna**, in northern Italy.

The great city of **Rome** is still universally recognized as the mother city of the empire - but it has not been the seat of government for more than a century.

3. Christianity

Since the time of **Constantine the Great** (reigned 311-37), all but one of the Roman emperors have been **Christians**. The Christian church is wealthy and powerful. Most cities have their own bishops, who are their most important citizens in their communities.

Slide 2: 400-500: In the fifth century, German tribes invade deep into the western half of the empire.

- In the fifth century, **German tribes** invade deep into the empire (note 1).
- They cause large-scale destruction in the **western Roman Empire** (note 2).
- **Rome** is sacked twice, by the Goths in 410 CE and the Vandals in 455 CE (note 3).

Notes

1. The fall of the western Roman Empire

In the early fifth century CE the western provinces of the Roman empire were overrun by various groups of **Germans**.

The major groups are the **Ostrogoths, Franks, Visigoths, Suebi**, and **Vandals**.

2. The destruction in the west

As the invading groups march across Roman territory, they leave a **swathe of destruction**. Towns are sacked, villas burnt, thousands of people are killed and many others fled their property. Archaeological evidence points to a marked decline in the population of western Europe.

3. Rome sacked

The **sack** of the great city of Rome by the **Goths** in 410 caused little damage. However, it sent a shockwave through the empire - if the very heart of the empire could be reached by the barbarians, who was safe?

The sack of the city by the **Vandals** (who had occupied North Africa and built a powerful fleet) in 455 was much more destructive; but even so the city was not fatally damaged.

In these sacks, successive **bishops of Rome** played important parts in protecting the city and its inhabitants from more harm. These bishops were already the leading figures in the Christian church, and now they were even more widely respected.

Slide 3: 500: In the west, Roman civilization has been badly damaged, but Christianity has survived.

- **Anglo-Saxon** tribes have settled in southern Britain, destroying Roman civilization, including Christianity.
- **German tribes** have formed several kingdoms in what was the Western Roman Empire.
- **Roman civilization** has been badly damaged, but in most places Christianity has survived.
- The **Eastern Roman Empire** has been almost unaffected. Life continues here much as before.

Notes

1. The fall of the western Roman empire

The major German groups - the Ostrogoths, Franks, Visigoths, Suebi, and Vandals - all established their own kingdoms in the former provinces of the western Roman Empire.

These kingdoms gradually extended their territories so that no Roman-ruled territory was left in this region.

The last emperor of the west, a young man called **Romulus Augustulus**, was deposed in 476 by a barbarian general.

2. The decline of Roman civilization

In the former western provinces, the Roman way of life went into sharp decline, as **cities** and **trade** shrank.

The **Christian Church**, however, increased its hold on the hearts and minds of the people. In the chaos of the barbarian invasions, **bishops** emerged as the protectors of their people, and became the leading figures in most towns.

The leading bishop within western Europe is the **bishop of Rome**. Despite his prestige, he has no authority over other bishops - at least, not yet.

Literacy, and with it the classical learning of the ancient Greeks and Romans, became increasingly restricted to the officials of the church. In fact, in the coming centuries they became known as the **clergy**, or clerks, as they were more or less the only ones who knew how to read and write.

3. The British Isles

In Britain, Roman civilization suffered a more total collapse than on the continent. Towns and town life (and along with it, Christianity and literacy) vanished. The land became divided amongst **Anglo-Saxon** chieftains and their followers.

By an odd twist, just as Christianity was vanishing from what is now England, it was spreading in Ireland, which had never been conquered by the Romans, and never become Christian. This is thanks to the work of a missionary called **St Patrick** and his followers.

4. The Eastern Roman Empire

The empire's eastern half remains intact, peaceful and prosperous. The provinces here were largely untouched by barbarian invasion. The cities and way of life of this region continues on as before.

Slide 4: 500-711: Arab armies, inspired by the new religion of Islam, conquer vast territories bordering, and even into, Europe.

- The kingdom of the **Franks** expands across modern-day France and beyond (note 1).
- After conquering most of the Middle East, **Arab** armies occupy North Africa and Spain (note 2).
- Great invasions by **Avar** and **Slav** tribes from central Europe, and by **Muslim** armies from Arabia, almost bring an end to the **East Roman Empire** (note 3).

Notes

1. The Frankish Kingdom

The **Frankish** kingdom conquered the Burgundians and pushed the Visigoths to Spain.

The Franks were much more supportive of the local Christian churches than other German groups.

The **Frankish** kingdom has expanded further eastwards deep into what is now Germany, taking in the Bavarians under their overlordship.

2. The expansion of Islam

In 711 Arab armies crossed from North Africa into **Spain**, quickly driving the Christian Visigothic kingdom into a small slither of mountainous territory in the north of the country.

Arab raiding forces would then invade **France**, but will be turned back.

3. The Eastern Roman Empire suffers major invasions

The Eastern Roman Empire has suffered full-scale invasions on several fronts. **Arab** tribesmen stormed out of their Arabian homeland and, motivated by their new religion, **Islam**, conquered huge chunks of the Byzantine Empire - Syria, Palestine, Egypt and North Africa.

At the same time, the **Avars**, a people from the steppes of central Asia who had settled in central Europe, led **Slav** tribes in a full-scale attack on Roman territory in the Balkans.

The Roman forces crumbled before the onslaught, and the Avars and their allies reached the gates of the empire's capital, **Constantinople** itself. The empire was only saved because the invaders were unable to breach the great walls of the city. However, the Romans have lost control of huge areas of land in the Balkans.

Slide 5: 711: The Eastern Roman Empire has been transformed by the invasions it has experienced.

- Missionaries from Ireland and from Rome have converted England and Scotland to **Christianity** (note 1).
- Italy is now divided between the Byzantine Empire and a German tribe called the **Lombards** (note 2).
- The Eastern Roman Empire has been radically changed by the invasions, so from now on we will refer to it as the **Byzantine Empire** (note 3).

Notes

1. The British Isles

In England, the many small **Anglo-Saxon** tribal kingdoms merged to form several larger ones.

In the sixth century, **missionaries** from Ireland travelled first to Scotland, and then to northern England. There they converted several kings and their followers to Christianity. A little later (in 597), missionaries arrived in southern England. They had been sent by the bishop of Rome, **Gregory the Great**.

The Roman missionaries gradually converted the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the south and middle of England. By 700 almost all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had been converted to Christianity.

2. Italy

The Eastern Roman emperor **Justinian** tried to reconquer Italy from the Goths. He briefly succeeded, but then a German tribe called the **Lombards** swept down into the peninsula and occupied much of newly-reconquered Roman territory.

These wars were **catastrophic** for the people of Italy. Many old Roman cities were left in ruins, and **Rome** itself suffered terrible damage after a long siege. The once-great city would not recover from this blow.

3. The Byzantine Empire

Within its shrunken territories, the Eastern Roman Empire experienced radical transformation. **Greek** replaced Latin as the language of government - Latin soon became a foreign tongue.

The whole population was put on a permanent war footing. Cities shrank, and fortified villages became the main settlements. Even **Constantinople** shrank in size.

Because of these root-and-branch changes, modern scholars call the Eastern Roman empire from this period onwards the **Byzantine Empire**.

Slide 6: 711-814: The Frankish kingdom has continued to expand, especially under its great ruler, Charlemagne.

- The Frankish realm continues to expand, especially under its great ruler, **Charlemagne** (note 1).
- The Christian kingdom of Asturias seizes territory from the Muslims. This begins the Christian **Reconquista** of Spain (note 2).

Notes

1. Charlemagne's empire

Under their great king, **Charlemagne**, the Franks conquered far into Germany, central Europe, northern Italy and northeastern Spain.

Charlemagne's wide-ranging campaigns favoured the rise of mobile forces, made up of **soldiers mounted on horseback**. From this time on, mounted, armoured warriors began to dominate the battlefields of Europe. In English, they would come to be known as **knights**.

Charlemagne strongly regarded himself as God's servant. When he conquered a pagan area (as in northern Germany), he insisted on the local people giving up their pagan ways and becoming Christians. Throughout his empire he supported the **pope's** leadership of the Christian world; and for the rest of the Middle Ages the pope's position at the **head of the Christian Church** would not be questioned by most Christians in western Europe.

2. Spain

In **northern Spain**, the Christian kings were able to take advantage of a civil war amongst the Muslims to grab some territory back. This would be the start of the **Reconquista** of Spain by Christian forces, a process that would take several centuries.

Slide 7: 814: Charlemagne's empire now covers much of western and central Europe.

- Charlemagne is crowned **emperor** by the bishop of Rome (the “pope”) on Christmas day, 800 (note 1).
- The **Byzantine Empire** regains much of the territory it had lost (note 2).

Notes

1. A new emperor

In December 800, Charlemagne had the pope crown him **emperor**. This was seen as a revival of the old Roman Empire.

The crowning of Charlemagne as emperor was a source of tension with the **Byzantines**. They regarded their own ruler as the only true emperor within the Christian world.

Charlemagne's court was in the German town of **Aachen**. This was not just a centre of government, but also a centre of learning as well. Charlemagne gathered Christian scholars from all over his empire to copy, preserve and study ancient writings.

2. Byzantine expansion

The Byzantine Empire has expanded under vigorous emperors. This will be a repeating pattern - the Byzantine Empire didn't just shrink and shrink - it shrank, expanded, shrank, expanded - but each time shrinking more and expanding less. You can follow the empire's ups and downs on the maps which follow.

Slide 8: 814-962 - I: Vikings from Scandinavia attack western Europe.

More on the Vikings

Scandinavian warriors called the **Vikings**, or Norse (Northerners), sailed long distances in their shallow but highly seaworthy longships. They raided coastal towns and sail far inland along even small rivers. They found monasteries with their treasures particularly juicy targets, but towns and villages were also put to the sword and many unfortunate people killed, or captured and enslaved.

Few places in western Europe were free from the fear of their sudden appearance.

The people of the **British Isles** suffered particularly badly, and the Norse soon controlled a large swathe of English territory, call the “Danelaw”. The Anglo-Saxons, however, eventually started to fight back, under their king, **Alfred the Great**, and his successors.

Trade and settlement

The Vikings do not come only as killers, plunderers and slavers. They were also **traders** and **settlers**. They set up trading bases from Ireland in the west to Russia, in the east. Many would grow into important towns.

Slide 9: 814-962 - II: Muslim pirates attack southern Europe.

More on Muslim raiders

From their bases in North Africa and Spain, **Arab raiders** roamed far and wide, attacking the Mediterranean coasts of Christian countries. The Mediterranean in fact became virtually a Muslim lake, with raiders being able to strike at will. Large stretches of coast were completely abandoned, their inhabitants moving to hilly areas inland. Muslim forces were even able to take and hold Christian towns for long periods.

In these circumstances, **trade** between Europe and the East more or less came to an end. Europeans were cut off even more than they had been from any influences coming from the great civilizations of the Middle East, India and China.

Slide 10: 814-962 - III: The Magyars, a nomadic tribe from central Asia, attack from the east.

More on the Magyars

In the last years of the 9th century, the **Magyars**, a nomadic people from the steppes of central Asia, established themselves in the middle Danube region of central Europe.

They were a warrior people who, like other nomads of central Asia, fought on horseback. They were therefore **highly mobile**. They conducted massive raids on a yearly basis, far and wide into central and western Europe. Wherever they appeared they pillaged the countryside, destroyed Christian armies sent against them, killed or enslaved local populations, and forced local rulers to pay tribute (i.e. protection money).

Slide 11: 962: The great raids are causing a new system to emerge in western Europe: feudalism.

- The Frankish Empire has broken up, but out of the wreckage has appeared the **Holy Roman Empire** (note 1).
- The attacks, plus civil wars, cause chaos. This gives rise to a new social and political system, called **Feudalism** (note 2).
- Viking settlers (known as the **Rus**) have established a huge new state in what is now Russia and Ukraine (note 3).

Notes

1. The Holy Roman Empire

After Charlemagne's death, power-struggles tore the empire apart. The leading successor states were the kingdoms of the **East Franks** (which would become Germany), the **West Franks** (which would become France) and **Italy** (which would NOT evolve into the later nation of Italy) were the leading kingdoms. In all of these, Charlemagne's descendants soon lost power to more local leaders.

The king of the East Franks, **Otto of Saxony**, defeated the Magyars in 955, and then seized control of the kingdom of Italy. He had himself crowned **emperor**

(962), and thus founded a new state which would be central to the map of Europe for the next eight hundred years. Later historians would come to call this the **Holy Roman Empire** (to distinguish it from the ancient Roman Empire).

2. The rise of feudalism

One of the important - and fairly complex - developments of this period was the rise of **feudalism**.

Anarchy

The civil wars which led to the break-up of Charlemagne's empire, plus the terrible attacks from Vikings, Arabs and Magyars, led to widespread chaos throughout western Europe. **Royal authority** collapsed, and localities fell under the control of regional **dukes** and **counts**.

In these circumstances, if a king needed to raise an army, he had to do so either from his own private estates, or (if a larger force was needed) by **negotiating** with the dukes and counts within his kingdom for their support.

Castles

Meanwhile, regional rulers began to construct wooden forts - **castles** - throughout their domains to provide local points of defence. These castles gave local villagers protection in times of attack from Vikings and other raiders.

The widespread **disorder** of the times led to unforeseen developments, however. Local rivalries and power-struggles became the order of the day, and castles gave their captains a base from which they could defend themselves against powerful neighbours. They could also resist any demands from their overlord which did not suit them.

It was therefore not long before these castle-captains had become a class of hereditary **local lords** in their own right. Just as kings had to negotiate with dukes and counts for support, so dukes and counts in their turn found themselves having to negotiate with local lords for *their* support.

Knights

In all the disorder, all lords - kings, dukes, counts and local lords - had to have armed followers. The most important of these were mounted soldiers, able to hurry to the defence of those under attack and protect the lord and his castle from neighbours. Originally hardly more than gangsters, these warriors soon formed elite fighting forces - the forebears of the later class of **knights**.

These developments formed the early stages in the rise of feudalism (for more, see the note on the next map).

3. The Rus

Viking traders and colonists set up trading posts along the great rivers of what is today **Russia** and **Ukraine**. These trading centres grew into towns, from which the Scandinavians extended their control over a vast hinterland. The state of **Rus** emerged, under the rule of the Grand Prince of **Kiev**.

4. The Bulgars and the Byzantines

On their new northern borders, the **Byzantine Empire** had to deal with yet another foe - the **Bulgars**. These were a people who had migrated from the steppes of central Asia about 100 years before. They defeated the Byzantines, and took a large chunk of territory from them.

Slide 12: 962-1066: Christendom is expanding as new peoples convert to Christianity.

- **Feudalism** has now developed fully in France, and is spreading to Italy, Germany, England and Spain (note 1).
- New lands in northern and central Europe have joined “**Christendom**” by conversion from paganism to Christianity (note 2).
- The bishops of Rome, the **popes**, are increasingly claiming spiritual and secular leadership in Christendom (note 3).

Notes

1. Feudalism

We have seen above (see note on last map) how western Europe fell into chaos after the time of Charlemagne. We have also seen how this led to the rise of a system in which kings had to negotiate with dukes and counts for their support, and dukes and counts in their turn had to negotiate with local lords for *their* support.

Lords and vassals

As time went by, it was in the interests of all these parties to put this system of agreements on a more formal footing. Thus, superiors sought to bind their inferiors to them with ties of loyalty, called **vassalage**: a **vassal** promised to follow his lord into battle, and to undertake other services for him (such as giving him advice and

giving him gifts from time to time). In return, the lord promised to protect his vassal, to respect his rights and treat him fairly.

These promises were underpinned by religious **ceremonies**, presided over by bishops, in which solemn oaths were given to each other by both lord and vassal.

Fiefs

Land which was held by a vassal in exchange for service to a lord was called a **fief**. This is why modern scholars have given the label **feudalism** (which is based on the word “fief”) to this hierarchy of relationships.

Knights

As we have seen, lords had retinues of armoured warriors trained to fight on horseback. These also became part of the pyramid of lord-vassal relations. Local lords took to awarding some of their knights with chunks of land in exchange for their services. These estates normally took in a village or two, and were called **manors** (which means land “held in the hand”).

As landowners, these **knights**, as we should now call them, thus became part of the feudal aristocracy. Like **castles** (many of which were now being rebuilt as the colossal stone structures which can still be seen today all over Europe), knights are indivisibly associated with the European **Middle Ages**.

A Pyramid of Power

A pyramid of lord-vassal relationships thus developed, stretching from kings and emperors at the top to knights at the bottom.

Kings (and Holy Roman emperors) had direct control of only small parts of their realms (called their **domains**). However, they could (normally) count on the support of the dukes and counts who ruled the different parts of their kingdoms, and who were now their vassals. These in turn could count on the support of their vassals, the local lords, who in turn were supported by their knights.

Complex as it may sound to us, in reality it could get far more complex! As time went by all sorts of odd situations arose. For example, a count or duke could (and in at least one case, did) end up controlling far more territory than his king. In other cases, a superior lord could end up with a fief for which he was a vassal to one of his own vassals!

Nevertheless, the **feudal system** seems to have worked most of the time. It enabled medieval rulers to keep much more order within their realms. As a result, the general chaos which had afflicted western Europe gradually subsided.

Serfs

This feudal power-structure of course could not have existed without the work of the **peasants**. These made up the great majority of the population. In a society which (like all pre-modern societies) was based around **agriculture**, there were the people who farmed the land.

By this period, the majority of peasants were semi-free **serfs**. That is, they and their families were tied to the land, and to the lord of the manor. This was the result of a long trend. Ever since late Roman times, more and more peasants had granted their land - and themselves - to local lords in exchange for protection.

The **lord of the manor** had a great deal of control over their lives, but it was not complete. Peasants had rights (which varied from place to place) which they expected the lord to respect.

2. New Christian lands

In the period just before and just after the year 1000, tribal peoples in central, northern and eastern Europe were converting to Christianity and forming organized kingdoms. In this way, **Christendom**, the realm of the Christians, was expanding strongly into formerly pagan lands.

In Scandinavia, the kingdoms of **Norway**, **Sweden** and **Denmark** appeared. Their kings gradually imposed order on the Viking chiefs, and the destructive raids came to an end.

In central Europe, the **Magyars** settled down to form the Christian kingdom of **Hungary** (in the year 1000). Similarly, the kingdom of **Poland** was founded a little later. A strip along the Baltic coast was absorbed into Christendom as the duchy of **Pomerania**.

In eastern Europe, the rulers (Grand Princes) of **Rus** have also converted to Christianity. They have done so through the influence of missionaries from Constantinople, and so follow the Byzantine tradition of Christianity.

Literacy

Where ever Christianity was adopted, literacy followed. In Scandinavia and central Europe this was based on the **Latin** alphabet, while in Russia it is based on the **Cyrillic** script (itself based on the Greek).

With literacy came Christian art and architecture. **Romanesque** churches spread into northern and central Europe, while **Byzantine** styles were introduced into eastern Europe.

3. The Popes

In western Europe, Christians had come to regard the bishop of Rome, as the head of the church. He was their spiritual father (*papa*, or **Pope**).

The popes were not under the thumb of any secular prince - in fact they had come to rule their own territory in central Italy (the **Papal States**).

The Great Schism

Shortly after 1000, popes had begun to claim that they were head of the all Christians, everywhere. This included the Christians of the **Byzantine Empire**.

The **Greek-speaking** Byzantine church and the **Latin-speaking** Church had been drifting apart for many centuries. Issues of belief divide them to some extent, but these were small. However, differences in ceremonies and other traditions had increasingly divided them.

Papal claims to superiority are the last straw. In 1054 the **Great Schism**, long brewing, occurred. The head of the Byzantine church, the **patriarch** of Constantinople **excommunicated** the pope, and the pope in response excommunicates the patriarch. The two churches thus severed the bonds there had been between them.

Both claimed to be the true church - the Byzantines called theirs' the **Orthodox** Church, the western Europeans called theirs' the **Catholic** Church.

Slide 13: 1066-1215 - I: William the Conqueror leads the Normans in conquering England.

- In 1066, a force from the French duchy of Normandy conquers England. Its leader will be famous in English history as "**William the Conqueror**" (note 1).
- In 1071, an army of Turks inflicts a shattering defeat on the Byzantine army at the **Battle of Manzikert**. The Turks then go on to occupy a huge part of the Byzantine Empire (note 2).
- The **population** of Europe is beginning to grow again, after many centuries (note 3).

Notes

1. The Normans

One of the legacies of the Viking raids was the duchy of **Normandy**. This was formed when the king of France allowed a group of Vikings (or *Northmen*, hence **Normans**) to settle in northern France on condition that they defended the French from attacks by other Vikings.

This they did, and soon adopted the French language and French ways.

They were a warlike people. A group of Norman mercenaries travelled to **southern Italy** to fight in the many wars between the small states there. They ended up founding their own county there.

More famously, **William**, the duke of Normandy, led a force of Norman knights in invading the kingdom of **England** in 1066. After defeating the English at the **Battle of Hastings** he was crowned king. In the following years he rewarded his knights with large grants of English land. He thus created a Norman ruling class, ruling over the English people.

2. The Byzantine Empire

The **Seljuq** Turks were a nomadic **Muslim** group from central Asia who took over most of the Middle East in the mid-11th century. Their conquests soon brought them to Asia Minor, where they destroyed a Byzantine army at the **Battle of Manzikert** (1071)..

After this victory, the Seljuqs occupied much of Asia Minor. For the Byzantines, the loss of this territory was a major blow, from which they never fully recovered.

3. Population growth

With the ending of the age of Viking raiders, and of instability and anarchy within the kingdoms, a measure of peace returned to western Europe. As a result, the **population** began to grow again, probably for the first time in many centuries.

Trade also began to revive, and **towns** started expanding again. They did so from very low base: at this time London had about 10,000 inhabitants.

Slide 14: 1066-1215 - II: A power-struggle takes place between the Church and secular rulers (kings, emperors, princes).

- The **popes'** claim to leadership in Christendom threatens the position of secular rulers. A power struggle follows (note 1).
- In **England**, the quarrel between kings and the church leads to the murder of an archbishop in his own cathedral (note 2).
- In **France**, the kings cast themselves as allies of the popes. With papal support their power increases (note 3).
- In the **Holy Roman Empire** the power struggle greatly weakens the emperors' authority (note 4).

Notes

1. Popes against Kings

The popes' continued to claim authority over all Christians, including over their emperors and kings. This sparked what is known in European history as the **Investiture Controversy**.

Who should appoint bishops?

This was a struggle over who should appoint **bishops**. It may seem an odd thing to us that such an issue could become so important. In the early Middle Ages, however, bishops were very important people.

Over the centuries, the church had come to own perhaps a third of the land and wealth of Europe. Most of this was controlled by the local bishops and **abbots** (see below). Emperors and kings had therefore tried to make sure that men **loyal to themselves** were appointed. In this way they could use the church's wealth to boost their own power.

It is no surprise that those whom the kings and emperors chose to fill these key religious posts were their own supporters, rather than men known for their holiness. Partly as a result of this, the **spiritual and moral** life of the church had fallen to a low level.

In the mid-11th century, a series of **popes** began much-needed **reforms** of church structures and practices. To help achieve this, they began claiming that their spiritual authority was **superior** to the secular authority of kings, emperors and princes. In particular, they began insisting on appointing bishops themselves.

The Investiture Controversy

In 1073 a new pope, **Gregory VII**, became pope. When he disapproved of a bishop chosen by the Holy Roman emperor, **Henry IV**, a power struggle began between the two men.

Henry persuaded the bishops in his realm to try and remove Gregory as pope. Gregory retaliated by **excommunicating** Henry. (Excommunication was an extreme punishment as it meant casting a person out from the church. Christians at that time believed that if a person died while excommunicated he could not get into heaven).

Gregory also called on the **Holy Roman Empire's** nobles to overthrow Henry. Realising the threat that this posed, Henry went to the castle in Italy where Gregory was staying, to ask him for forgiveness. For three days Gregory refused to see him, leaving the emperor standing barefoot outside the castle. Eventually Gregory accepted Henry's apology. He allowed him back into the church, and called on the nobles to return to their loyalty.

This was a dramatic event, and its message was clear: the pope was someone not to be messed with.

The power struggle between popes and emperors did not stop, however. It was not until fifty years later, 1132, that a pope and an emperor reached a compromise. In this, the church would choose all its bishops and abbots, but they must swear to obey the emperor.

Even this did not end the struggle between the church and **secular rulers** (kings, emperors and princes). All the major realms of Europe were affected, notably England, France and above all the Holy Roman Emperors.

Monastic orders

The reform movement which the popes led at this time led to the rise of **monastic orders** in Europe.

Until now, the **Benedictines** were the only major order of monks. They had been founded in the 6th century; They had pioneered the monastic way of life in western Europe. In this, men separated themselves from the rest of the world and lived together in a community called a monastery. Here they lived lives of prayer and worship, and undertaking other services such as copying ancient books, teaching local boys, healing the sick and feeding the poor.

These **monks** were under the authority of **abbots**. Over time, some of these monasteries became extremely wealthy, as local people left them land and treasure on their deaths. The monks in them became rather lax in their religious duties. As a result, other monastic orders were founded in the 11th century.

Some, such as the **Cluniacs** and the **Cistercians**, were based in isolated monasteries. Others, such as the **Dominicans** and later the **Franciscans**, lived in towns and cities, serving the people there. Many women also accepted into monastic orders as **nuns**.

2. England

The power struggle between the church and kings affected England, and kings tried to keep the church under their control, and the church (encouraged by the popes) resisted.

This struggle came to a head in the reign of **Henry II** (1158-89). A quarrel between Henry, who was trying to assert royal authority over the clergy, and the archbishop of Canterbury, **Thomas á Becket**, who was insisting on church control, resulted in the murder of Becket at the altar of Canterbury cathedral, in 1170.

As a result of this event, Henry had to back down. However, he and later kings learned to exert **influence** over the church within their kingdom in more subtle ways. In this way they were able to make sure that, most of the time, their supporters were appointed bishops. The tensions between church and king gradually subsided.

3. France

At the time of the Investiture Controversy, the kings of **France** were more preoccupied with the threat from their over-powerful nobility than with the challenge posed by the popes' claims. They therefore posed as loyal defenders of Church authority within their realm. The popes rewarded them by consistently upholding their royal authority. With this powerful support, the kings were able to bring their nobles much more under their power.

4. The Holy Roman Empire

Of all the realms of Europe, the **Holy Roman Empire** was most deeply affected by the struggle between popes and secular rulers. Even after the compromise reached in 1132 (see above), tensions continued at a high level. The emperors bitterly opposed what they saw as the continuing interference by the popes in their realm. The popes, for their part, stirred up the nobles and cities of Germany and northern Italy against them. The result was a series of **civil wars**.

These civil wars gradually undermined the power of the emperors. The nobles and cities became more and more powerful within their own localities. This process went furthest in northern Italy, where the cities became independent of the Holy Roman emperor in all but name. In effect, they became self-ruling **city-state** republics.

Slide 15: 1066-1215 - III: Christian rulers in western Europe have organized several Crusades against Muslim lands for control of Jerusalem.

- In response to the threat to the Byzantines, the Christian rulers in western Europe organize several **Crusades** against Muslim control of Jerusalem (note 1).
- The Christian **Reconquista** of Spain makes great strides (note 2).
- Close contact between Christians and Muslims leads to new **knowledge and ideas** coming into Europe (note 3).

Notes

1. The Crusades

The rise of the Seljuq Turks in the Muslim world had had two results, so far as Christendom was concerned. The first was that the Seljuqs seem to have closed Jerusalem to Christian pilgrims (although the evidence for this is not very clear). Even if this was not true, reports of pilgrims being mistreated led to widespread indignation throughout Europe.

More importantly, the Seljuqs, as we saw above, had won a great victory over the Byzantines at the battle of Manzikert, and then occupied much of their territory.

The Byzantines were fearful for their vempire's ery existence. In desperation, they appealed to their Christian co-religionists for help against the Muslim Seljuqs. The **pope** responded with a call to arms, and in 1096 several of the kings and princes of **Christendom** led a huge, rambling expedition - a mixture of military campaign and religious pilgrimage - to capture the city of **Jerusalem** from the Muslims.

This campaign is known to European history as the **First Crusade**. It succeeded in conquering territory in Syria and Palestine, including Jerusalem. This was divided into several principalities, organized along European, feudal lines.

Not long after the First Crusade, Muslim forces began taking back territory in Syria and the Holy Land. The **Second Crusade** (1147-9) completely failed to reverse the Muslim advance. **Jerusalem**, the central objective of the crusading movement, fell to Muslim forces in 1187. The **Third Crusade** (1189-92), though successful in recovering some territory, failed to take Jerusalem back.

2. The Reconquista in Spain

In southern Spain, the Muslim Caliphate had broken up into **rival states**. This aided the Christian kingdoms to the north in taking much more territory from the Muslims.

3. Increasing contacts with the Muslim world

As well as warfare between Christians and Muslims as a result of the Crusades and the Reconquista, there were more peaceful contacts between the two sides. In fact, this period saw the Christian world brought into **much closer touch** with the Muslim world, with its far more sophisticated civilization.

Through these contacts, **Islamic science** (including advances in medicine and optics), **Indian mathematics** (and with it “Arabic” numbers, the decimal system, the concept of zero, and algebra), and **Greek philosophy** (most of which was lost to the west after the fall of the western Roman empire) spread through Europe.

This was aided by the establishment of **universities** in more and more European cities. These were mostly set up by monks, whose thirst for new knowledge and ideas had been stimulated by European contacts with Muslim learning (and the universities may themselves have been modelled on Muslim *madrasas*.)

Of more immediate effect, technologies such as the much-improved **astrolabe** and the **magnetic compass** also arrive in Europe via these contacts, as do the **spinning wheel** and the **windmill**.

Slide 16: 1215: The Byzantine Empire has suffered serious set-backs at the hands of Muslims and Crusaders.

- In England, the barons force the king to respect the rights of his subjects by signing **Magna Carta** (note 1).
- Instead of fighting the Muslims, in 1204 the 4th Crusade attacks the Byzantine (and Christian) city of **Constantinople** (note 2).
- Western Europe is experiencing strong **economic growth**, with populations, trade and towns all expanding (note 3).

Notes

1. Magna Carta

In the late 12th centuries the kings of England had come to rule a large part of France. By 1215, however, **King John** had lost most of these territories. In his

determination to regain his family's French lands, he had tried to extort the necessary funds from the English nobility.

These rose in rebellion against him, and forced him to sign an agreement to respect their rights. This agreement is known as the **Magna Carta** ("Great Charter"). It future become the foundation for citizens' rights in England and all countries whose legal systems are based on English law.

2. The Fourth Crusade and its results

A **Fourth Crusade** (1202-4) ended up, through greed and misunderstandings, with the crusaders not going to the Holy Land at all. Instead, they sacked the great **Byzantine** (and of course Christian!) city of **Constantinople**.

They then installed their own emperor there, and divided most of the Byzantine territory up amongst the Crusader leaders. Byzantine-in-exile regimes also emerged. Byzantine power, however, has been fatally weakened. This will have grave consequences for the whole of Christian Europe in years to come.

3. Economic growth

These centuries were a time of **prosperity** for Europeans, reflected most clearly in the magnificent **Gothic cathedrals** that were being constructed all around Europe.

Population

In the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, the **population** of western and central Europe increased strongly.

This was due to various factors. Perhaps the most important was that the **feudal system** had given a much higher level of law and order to European society.

Farming was also more **productive**. A new piece of technology, the **heavy plow**, allowed farmers to more easily grow crops on the heavy clay soils which covered much of western and northern Europe.

The introduction of the **horse collar** may also have been important. It meant that horses could drag heavy loads more easily. They were now increasingly replacing oxen, which were very strong but very slow, to draw plows. Larger fields could be plowed more efficiently.

Whatever the causes, more food was grown, more mouths fed, and more children grew to adulthood. This in turn led to more and more **land** being brought under cultivation. New **villages** sprang up in areas that had previously been wilderness.

Trade

Local and long-distance **trade** expanded. The region most affected by this was northern **Italy**.

The Crusades had led to a huge rise in Christian shipping in the **Mediterranean**. At first, this was to transport many crusaders to the east; then it was used to supply crusader bases; and finally, the shipping turned to bringing back cargoes of eastern goods to Europe - closer contact with the Muslim world had given wealthy Europeans a taste for Asian spices, textiles and other goods.

Towns and cities

Old **towns** grew in size and many new ones appeared. **Merchants** and **craftsmen** prospered, and increased in influence. They organized themselves into **guilds**, which were soon running much of the towns' affairs.

Towns and cities grew in power. They were valuable sources of **revenue** for rulers, who in return granted them rights to **self-government**. The inhabitants of towns became citizens, which made them quite different from the serfs of the countryside.

Independent republics

Although towns all over Europe enjoyed increasing autonomy, in northern Italy they won virtual independence for themselves, from the **Holy Roman Empire**.

The cities all became free **republics** (although they theoretically remained within the empire).

Slide 17: 1215-1347 - I: The Crusades to the Middle East peter out, but crusading movements spring up in other places.

More on Crusading and Chivalry

Despite its failures in the eastern Mediterranean, the **crusading movement** spread to parts of Europe.

In **Spain**, the *Reconquista* had been rebranded as a crusade by the popes. In southern **France**, a crusade was organized against an heretical group called the **Albigensians**. This resulted in bringing this region, hitherto effectively independently of the king, under much tighter royal control.

In Northern Europe, an order of German and Danish warrior-monks, the **Knights of the Sword**, were active in fighting the pagans of Livonia, grabbing large chunks of their territory and forcing their conversion to Christianity. They later merged with another German crusading order, the **Teutonic Knights**, who aggressively expanded their lands on the southern shores of the Baltic Sea.

Orders of Knighthood

The orders of knights mentioned above were but two of several military orders to which the crusades gave rise. The **Knights Templar** and the **Knights of St John** were probably the most famous. Their members were part-soldiers, part-monks. They ran hostels and hospitals for the crusaders, and garrisoned holy sites in Syria and Palestine.

The Rise of Chivalry

This development was part of a broader trend, which saw the rise of a knightly code of behaviour called **Chivalry**.

This emphasised the role of the Christian knight, whose duty is to be a servant of God, to be faithful to his feudal lord and to defend the weak. He was to behave, in short, as a “gentle man”. Linked to this was the rise in the knight’s social status to that of a **gentleman**.

At the same time came the rise of **Heraldry**. This started out with a practical purpose. With knights’ **armour** covering more of the face, it became more difficult to tell friend from foe. So they took to wearing **insignia** on their armour, by which their identities could be shown. This insignia came to represent their families, and their **ancestry**.

By this period, one’s place in the feudal network of relationships was **hereditary**: this was true for kings, dukes, counts, barons and knights. These high ranking individuals and their families made up the feudal **aristocracy** of medieval European society.

Slide 18: 1215-1347 - II: A ferocious invasion by the Mongols, a people from central Asia, leaves a trail of destruction.

More on the Mongols

A new people has appeared in Europe - the **Mongols**.

The Mongols were a people who lived in the steppes of eastern Asia. Until the early 13th century they had been divided into different tribes. At that time, however, they were united by a brilliant leader, called Genghis Khan. He then led them on wars of conquest, which, under him and his sons, created the largest empire the world had yet seen.

In the 1240s, a series of destructive campaigns brought all the **Russian** principalities under their control. The Mongols then went on a devastating raid into central Europe, which left **Hungary** with half its population dead.

In the 1260s the Mongol Empire was divided amongst different branches of its royal family. The western portion, which ruled the Russian principalities, was called the **Golden Horde**.

Slide 19: 1347: Representative Assemblies have grown up around Europe

- In England, **parliament** has become an important part of government (note 1).
- In the **Holy Roman Empire**, the emperor has become so weak that the leading nobles, bishops and towns have become almost independent of him (note 2).
- The **Crusaders** have been driven from the eastern Mediterranean (note 3).

Notes

1. Representative Assemblies

From the 12th century onwards, **representative assemblies** had appeared in various kingdoms during the Middle Ages. The **estates-general** in France, the **cortes** in the Spanish kingdoms, the **imperial diet** in the Holy Roman Empire, and parliament in England, were examples of these.

They grew out of the **royal councils** which feudal kings had originally had to advise them (as noted above in the sections on the rise of feudalism, a king's vassals had the duty to advise him). These councils gradually came to include, not just nobles and bishops, but also representatives of towns (and in England, counties).

They were a useful way of getting agreement from broad sections of society to raise **taxes**. In most cases they met only infrequently, when the king was in need of money.

Varying destinies

In most European kingdoms, the nobles had been suspicious of royal power. They saw as a threat to their traditional privileges (which it was). They used the assemblies as a focus for **opposition** and a means of checking their rulers' authority. Most kings therefore called them as rarely as possible, and at the first opportunity they had, they dispensed with them altogether.

The English parliament

In England, however, **parliament** was becoming a regular part of the way English government worked.

Ever since the Norman conquest (see above, 1066), the English nobility had been used to obeying their kings. It was only in the most dire circumstances that they rebelled (as when King John drove them to get him to sign Magna Carta). They were in general much more cooperative with the crown, and therefore English monarchs were much more comfortable in calling parliaments. It became a useful way to gain **widespread support** for royal policies, and for the taxes that these required.

Little by little, the English parliament became **indispensable** to kings, and so gradually gained in influence and status.

2. The Holy Roman Empire

In the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, the **Holy Roman Empire** experienced repeated bouts of **civil war**. The nobles were supported by the **popes**, who used the weapon of **excommunication** against the emperors on more than one occasion. The **Italian cities** had effectively gained their independence already (see above), and now the German nobles turned themselves into **independent princes**, owing only the weakest allegiance to the emperors. The Holy Roman Empire became little more than a collection of **independent states**.

3. The end of the Crusades in the Eastern Mediterranean

The Crusaders gradually lost **all their territories** in Syria and the Holy Land. The last Crusader outpost on the coast of Palestine fell to Muslim forces in 1291.

By this time, the Crusaders had also been driven out of Constantinople (1261) and the **Byzantine Empire** restored. However, it would never again regain its former size and power. More importantly, it would be unable to save Christian Europe from a new Muslim threat, in the form of the Ottoman Turks.

Slide 20: 1347-1352: A dreadful plague sweeps through Europe. This is known as the Black Death.

More on the Black Death

We have seen above how the population of western and central Europe seems to have reached its limit by the end of the 13th century. But this was not the last long.

The **Black Death** arrived in Europe in 1347. It came from central Asia, first appearing in the Italian trading posts on the Black Sea. From there it was carried to Constantinople, and thence to the trading cities of northern Italy.

It is soon spread along the **trade routes** of Europe, to towns in Italy, France, Spain, England, Scotland, the Low Countries, Germany, Scandinavia and central Europe. It finally petered out in Russia. From the towns it rapidly spreads to rural villages, carried by townsmen fleeing their homes in panic.

Wherever the plague went it killed between a third and a half of the population.

Trauma

The Black Death was an enormously traumatic event for Europeans. In the immediate aftermath, hysterical behaviour became widespread. There were **massacres of Jews** and other groups outside mainstream society. **Flagellants**, groups of people who went around whipping themselves in punishment for their sins, spread around Europe.

Deeper social change came later (see next map).

Slide 21: 1352-1450: In the century after the Black Death, huge changes affect Europe.

- In its wake, the **Black Death** has had a huge impact on western Europe (note 1).
- The **Hundred Years War** between England and France helps to transform European warfare (note 2).
- Medieval Christendom faces crisis as criticism of the teaching and practices of the **Catholic Church** grows (note 3).
- The **Ottoman** sultanate expands its power in Asia Minor and into Europe (note 4).

Notes

1. The Impact of the Black Death: Social change

After the Black Death, there were fewer peasants and labourers alive. Landowners and merchants therefore had to compete with one another for their services. The surviving rural and urban workers found they could charge for **higher wages** and **better conditions**.

Members of the poorer classes (that is, the big majority of the population) now became a lot **better off** than before. This led to the **end of serfdom** in western Europe. Peasants became free farmers.

2. The Impact of the Black Death: Religious unrest

In the Middle Ages, many people looked to the **Church** for comfort and guidance. During the 14th and 15th centuries, however, the Church had become wealthy and worldly. Matters were worst at the very top. **Popes** behaved more like secular princes than spiritual leaders. The feeling spread that the lives of leading Churchmen had very little to do with the kind of life that Jesus and his disciples preached.

This development was made worse by bitter **power-struggles** going on between church leaders. For quite a long period of time there were two, sometimes even three, rival popes, chosen by different groups. Each pope would excommunicating the other(s), leaving ordinary Christians confused as to whom they should obey.

Unsurprisingly, **religious unrest** spread around Europe, and criticism of the clergy became common.

3. The Hundred Year War

The **Hundred Years' War** between **England** and **France** raged off and on between 1337 and 1453. This began when the king of England, **Edward III**, claimed the throne of France (he being the nearest relative to the childless French king).

The war was really a series of separate campaigns. These were all fought within France. Sometimes the English won great victories, such as at **Crécy** (1346) and **Agincourt** (1415). After these, their territory in France would expand. Soon, though,, the French would take back their territory.

Joan of Arc

For a short period before 1430 a young peasant woman, called **Joan of Arc**, rallied the French soldiers into defeating the English. In that year she was captured by her enemies, handed over to the English and burnt at the stake. However, this did not stop the English from being driven out of France (except a small area on the north coast) by 1453.

Results of the war

Within France, victory against the English greatly strengthened the authority of the French king at the expense of his nobles.

For England, defeat in France and the arrival back home of thousands of demoralized soldiers, led to a large rise in disorder around the country. This undermined the authority of the royal government, and a series of civil wars - the **Wars of the Roses** - soon began.

Changes in warfare

The Hundred Years War showed that the days of aristocratic **knights** was drawing to a close. In major battles, ordinary men armed with long **pikes** or **long bows** defeated heavily-armed mounted knights.

More importantly, the wars saw the first use of **gunpowder weapons** in European warfare. These had probably been brought to Europe from China, via the Mongols. During the Hundred Years War, however, **cannons** and **firearms** (hand-held guns) became more powerful and more reliable. As firearms mowed down charging knights and cannons knocked down castle walls, the old **feudal** nobility was brought under firm royal control.

The rise of professional armies

Even before this had happened, European armies had ceased to be raised by rulers calling upon their **vassals** to join the royal standard. Instead, they had increasingly found that raising armies of full-time **professional** troops, paid for out of **taxation**, was much more efficient.

4. The Rise of the Ottoman Empire

In Asia Minor, the **Seljuq** sultanate collapsed into several small Turkish emirates. One of these, ruled by the descendants of a warrior-leader called Othman (hence it is called the **Ottoman** sultanate), expanded. It took territory from the Byzantine Empire in western Asia Minor, and then invaded across into Europe. The **Byzantine Empire** shrank to a tiny fraction of its former self.

The Ottomans also conquered all the other Turkish emirates in Asia Minor.

Slide 22: 1450: Europe is now leaving the Europe of the Middle Ages into Early Modern Europe.

- The **Italian Renaissance** begins. This will revolutionize European culture (note 1).
- The Portuguese send out **voyages of discovery** to find out more about the world outside Europe (note 2).
- The **Ottoman Empire** has conquered deep into Europe (note 3).

Notes

1. Italian Renaissance

The **city-states** of northern Italy recovered well from the Black Death, and again experienced strong economic growth. They were in continuous competition with one another. This competition expressed itself in a struggle for political dominance, but also in the building of **magnificent buildings** and the creation of **beautiful statues** and **paintings**.

Their leading families were the international merchants and bankers of Europe. One of the most prominent was the **Medici** of **Florence**. This was the leading city of **Tuscany**. The Medici turned Florence into the cultural centre of this movement.

The **Italian Renaissance**, as this movement would come to be called, would be one of the main causes behind the emergence of **Early Modern Europe**. It looked for inspiration to the ancient Greeks and Romans. In doing so, it led to a search for new understandings of all kinds - politics, law, history, geography, and especially in **science**.

2. The dawn of the Age of European Exploration

In **Portugal**, a young member of the royal family called Prince Henry set about organizing **voyages of exploration** down the west coast of Africa. He did this in the hopes of finding valuable goods there. If found, these could be bought from the inhabitants of those lands, brought back to Europe and sold on the other Europeans at a big profit. He thus hoped to increase the wealth and power of his small country.

By this date (1450), Henry's ships had sailed along the African coast to south of the Sahara Desert. They had successfully reached peoples with whom they could trade, and had begun to bringing back **gold**, **ivory** and **slaves**, at great profit. This spurred on Henry's explorers to greater efforts, and they sailed further and further down the African coast.

Although Henry himself never ventured on any of these expeditions, he would go down in history as “**Henry the Navigator**”, in recognition of his role in organizing them. He was a key figure in the dawning of the European **Age of Discovery**.

2. Questions

A. Quick Questions

The answers are given (*in Italics*).

1. Which peoples occupied what is now England after the fall of the Roman Empire?
(*The Saxons, or Anglo-Saxons*)
2. Who was the great Frankish king who conquered a large part of western Europe and was crowned emperor in 800 CE? (*Charlemagne*)
3. Which people from northern Europe began raiding the coasts of Britain and other countries at the end of the 8th century? (*The Vikings, Norse, Northmen, Scandinavians* - all these labels will do)
4. What large state in Medieval Europe covered Germany and much of Italy? (*The Holy Roman Empire*)
5. What is the system of organizing society which appeared in 10/11th century western Europe called? (*The Feudal System, or Feudalism*)
6. Who was the head of the Christian church in western Europe (*The pope, or bishop of Rome*)
7. Which country did the Normans, under their duke William, invade in 1066? (*England*)
8. What were a series of expeditions aimed at gaining Jerusalem from the Muslims called? (*The Crusades*)
9. What is the name given to agreement made between king John of England and his nobles in 1215? (*Magna Carta*)
10. By what name is the long series of wars in Spain between Christians and Muslims known? (*The Reconquista*)
11. What is the name given to the pandemic which swept Europe in the mid-14th century? (*The Black Death*)
12. The Hundred Years War was fought between which countries? (*England and France*)
13. What was the cultural movement which emerged in Italy in the 15th century? (*The Renaissance, or Italian Renaissance*)

B. Student project

1. In groups, follow one of the following **themes**, and then do a presentation to the class, on the following (each group takes one topic):

The Christian Church
The Feudal System
Population trends
The position of the peasants
Towns and cities
Military developments

And/or the following **countries**:

England
France
Spain
Italy
The Holy Roman Empire
Russia
The Byzantine Empire

And/or the following **episodes** (including their causes and results)

The Viking Invasions
The Crusades
The Black Death
The 100 Years War

In a wrap up session, the class discusses:

1. What were the chief characteristics of Medieval Europe?
2. Which changes or episodes in the history of Europe in the Middle Ages had the most impact on later history?

C. Analytical questions:

The information given within the presentation and notes will help to provide most of the answers. In some places, however, students may have to use some intelligent guesswork (or speculation, as it is called by historians) to fill in the gaps.

1. By what methods did Christianity spread up to 1200?

2. What impact did the raids of the Vikings, Muslims and Magyars have on western Europe?
3. How did the Feudal System help restore order to western Europe?
4. What factors made Europe become more prosperous after about 1000?
5. Do you think that Magna Carta has any relevance to us today?
6. What was the impact of the Black Death on Europe?
7. What changes occurred in the later Middle Ages to bring about the early modern world in Europe?