

Premium TimeMaps Slideshow

Medieval Europe

Student's Slideshow Commentary

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Introduction

This activity can be used as a stand-alone exercise, as an introduction to this topic in world history; or as a wrap up/reinforcement exercise.

The slideshow can also be used by students in their project work. For this they will need to access the resource themselves, as well as the student commentary (or a printout of it). This will require a multi-user licence.

For each slide, the commentary mostly follows the same formula:

1. Heading: slide number and date

2. Introductory paragraph (in bold)

This seeks to encapsulate in a sentence or two what's going on in the map. These are in bold.

3. Bullet points

One or more bullet points, giving very brief points of interest in the map, or in the period it covers.

4. Additional note(s)

For most slides there are additional notes. These give more in-depth support to the bullet points. Much of the information these contain may be superfluous to your needs, especially if you are covering the topic quickly. However, we have included it so that it is there for you if you want it.

We suggest that, prior to using the Presentation with your class, you go through these additional notes and highlight any you wish to use.

Sometimes there are notes in italics - these are simply hints and tips for teachers. They don't occur very often.

A suggestion:

To keep your students more engaged (and, by the way, if your students are not engaged or benefitting from these maps, then let us know and we'll refund your money!), why not start each new map with a question, such as, "How is this map different from the previous one?"

Commentary

When using the Sideshow in class it might be helpful to print these notes out.

Slide 1: 400 CE

At the end of the fourth century, the Roman Empire's territory is still almost at its full extent. The empire's society and economy remains intact.

- There are currently two Roman emperors, one for the eastern half and one for eat western half (see note 1).
- Christianity is the official religion of the empire (note 2).

Additional notes

Note 1: Two emperors

The emperor of the eastern empire rules from his capital, Constantinople; the emperor of the western empire rules from Milan, in northern Italy.

The city of Constantinople was founded by the emperor Constantine the Great in 330 CE. Since then it has been the capital of the eastern half of the Roman empire. After Rome itself it is the largest city in the empire.

Milan has been one of the main imperial headquarters for almost a century. It was chosen for its strategic location, near the frontiers but well-placed to guard against invasions for Italy.

Very shortly, however, the western emperor, Honorius, will transfer the capital to Ravenna This is because it is surrounded by marshes, which makes it hard to attack.

Rome is still by far the largest city in the empire. It is universally regarded as the mother city of the Romans. However, it has not been the capital for more than a hundred years.

Note 2: Christianity

Since the reign of Constantine the Great (311-37), most Roman emperors have been Christians. As a result, the Christian church has become powerful and wealthy. In most cities, the Christian bishop is the most important citizen in the community.

The bishop with the most prestige is the bishop of Rome. However, at this date he has no direct authority over churches in other cities.

Slide 2: 476 CE

In the fifth century CE the western provinces of the Roman Empire were overrun by German tribes.

- These tribes marched across the western provinces in Gaul, Spain, and even on into North Africa. They left a swathe of destruction behind them (note 1).

- The city of Rome itself was sacked in 410 CE, and then again in 455 CE (note 2).
- The frontier provinces in Britain were more or less abandoned by the Roman government (note 3).
- In 476 CE the last Roman emperor in the west was deposed (note 4).

Additional notes

Note 1: The Barbarian invasions

These various groups were mainly of German origin, including the Ostrogoths, Suebi, Visigoths, Burgundians, Franks and Vandals. The invaders left cities sacked, villas burnt and thousands of people homeless.

Modern scholars think that these German groups migrated from their previous homelands because of fear of the Huns. These were a people who had arrived into central Europe, from central Asia, sometime in the fourth century. They soon developed a reputation for unmatched barbarity. Native peoples fled before them.

The German groups eventually settled down in different areas of Gaul (Franks Burgundians, Visigoths), Spain (Visigoths, Suebi) and North Africa (Vandals).

Note 2: Rome sacked

The sack of the great city of Rome by the Goths in 410 CE caused little damage, but it sent a shockwave through the empire. People asked, if the very heart of the empire could be reached by the barbarians, who is safe?

The sack of the city by the Vandals in 455 CE (who had occupied North Africa and built a powerful fleet) was much more destructive.

Note 3: Britain

In 410 CE the emperor Honorius wrote a letter to the inhabitants of Britain telling them more or less to fend for themselves. It looks as though the Roman troops in Britain had been ordered across the Channel to help deal with the troubles on the continent.

Note 4: The last Roman emperor in the West

In 476 the last Roman emperor in the west, a young boy named Romulus Augustulus, was deposed by his chief general, a “barbarian” of unknown origin called Odoacar.

There is now only one Roman emperor left, based in Constantinople.

Slide 3: 500 CE

The eastern half of the Roman Empire remains intact, but the western provinces have vanished and are now home to several German kingdoms.

- In the west, Roman rule has vanished and Roman civilisation has been badly weakened (note 1).
- In the chaos, the Church and its bishops have played a leading role in protecting people from attack and helping them survive (note 2).

- In Britain, Roman civilization has suffered an almost total collapse, and Christianity has all but disappeared (note 3).
- The eastern provinces here have been largely untouched by barbarian invasion (note 4).

Additional notes

Note 1: Destruction in the West

In the West, many cities have been destroyed, and the surviving cities have shrunk. The population of the region has shrunk and the economy gone into sharp decline. Education and learning has suffered greatly, and literacy is increasingly limited to Churchmen.

Note 2: The Church

As a result of the role Church leaders have played in defending people from Barbarian attack, people now look to them for protection. In most towns and cities the Bishop is the most important figure. The Christian church has become one of the most important institutions in society.

Note 3: The British Isles

In Britain, Roman civilization has suffered an almost total collapse. Towns, Christianity and literacy have vanished. Much of the old Roman province has become divided amongst pagan Anglo-Saxon chieftains and their followers from northern Germany.

Christianity is now spreading in Ireland, however. This island was never conquered by the Romans, and never became Christian until now. It is being converted by a missionary called Patrick and his followers.

Note 4: The Eastern Roman Empire

The empire's eastern half remains intact, peaceful and prosperous. Cities and city life continue to thrive, as they have for hundreds of years. As in the West, the Church has become a major institution, and dominates the spiritual and intellectual life of the empire.

Slide 4: 732 CE

In the Seventh century CE, Arab armies burst out of their homeland and conquered a huge empire.

- The Arab armies, motivated by their new religion of Islam, quickly occupied almost all the Middle East, and later North Africa and most of Spain as well (note 1).
- The Arab invasions, plus major attacks by Slav tribes from central Europe, have greatly reduced the Eastern Roman Empire (or Byzantine Empire, as it should now be known as) (note 2).
- In the West, the kingdom of the Franks has expanded right across modern-day France and into western Germany (note 3).
- A series of destructive wars have resulted in the final end of Roman civilization in Italy, but has also lead to the emergence of the popes as the leaders of the western Church (note 4).
- The people of Britain have been converted to Christianity, which had disappeared here after the end of Roman rule (note 5).

Additional notes:

Note 1: The Arab conquests

From the 630s, Arab armies swept out of Arabia, motivated by the teachings of their prophet, Muhammed (c. 570-632 CE), completely conquered the Persian Empire, and occupied huge chunks of the Byzantine Empire. They then went on to occupy North Africa and most of Spain and Portugal. Here, the Christian Visigothic kings clung on in the mountains in the north of the country, where they rule over the rump of their kingdom.

Muslim Spain and Portugal

In Spain and Portugal, the Muslim Arabs have brought with them their highly literate and urban civilization. They have established a state which will, for a long time, be by far the most advanced region in western Europe.

The Battle of Tours

Arab armies then began raiding deep into France. In 732, however, a large Muslim raiding force was defeated at the Battle of Tours by a Frankish army. After this, the raids subsided (though modern scholars think this was more to do with rebellions within the Muslim area than with this defeat).

Note 2: Eastern Roman Empire / Byzantine Empire

The invasions by Arab armies, coupled with migrations by Slav tribes from central Europe, drastically reduce the territory of the East Roman Empire. Both Slavs and Arabs have laid siege to the capital, Constantinople, on several occasions. None of these sieges has succeeded, however, and the Eastern Roman Empire has survived.

From Roman to Byzantine

The wars have brought about great changes to the empire. Cities have shrunk or vanish altogether. Greek has replaced Latin as the language of government. Society have been placed on a permanent war-footing, and the state is now thoroughly organized for war.

The break with the past is so great that scholars refer to the empire after this time, not as the Eastern Roman, but as Byzantine (from the Greek city, Byzantium, which had been renamed Constantinople).

Note 3: The Franks

Over several centuries the Frankish kings had expanded their power over all of France, and into western Germany and north-east Spain. They claim to be champions of the "Catholic" Christian Church (i.e the majority of the Church which followed the teachings agreed by previous councils of church leaders). They suppressed Christian groups hostile to "Catholic" Christian teachings. This won them the support of bishops in Gaul and beyond, and greatly bolstered their authority.

However, the old line of French kings, who were descended from the German war-leaders who had led the Franks in invading Roman territory back in the 5th century, had become weak. They came under the domination of a new family, whose leaders had become the *de facto* rulers of the Franks.

Charles "Martel" (The Hammer), was the leader of this family who commanded the Frankish force at the Battle of Tours (see above, note 1). Under him, Frankish power, which had been declining under weak kings, was restored.

Note 4: Italy

Italy has experienced a series of destructive conflicts. First, the Romans (or Byzantines) reconquered it in a long war under their emperor Justinian, only for a German tribe called the Lombards to sweep down into the peninsula and occupy much of it.

During these troubled times, almost all the old Roman cities (including Rome itself) were left largely in ruins and Roman civilization finally disappeared from the land of its birth.

The bishops of Rome increasingly played the role of protectors for their people, in the face of threats from all sides. As a result, their prestige, already high as the spiritual heads of the greatest city in western Europe, rose to new levels. At some point in these centuries they began to become widely recognised as the leading bishops in western Europe, known as the “popes” (from *papa*, “father”).

Note 5: The British Isles

In England, many small Anglo-Saxon kingdoms became established, and then merged with one another to form a few larger ones.

In the Sixth and Seventh centuries, two groups of Christian missionaries arrived, one from Ireland and other from Rome. They have converted almost all England and Scotland to Christianity.

Slide 5: 814 CE

Under their great ruler, Charlemagne, the Frankish realm has expanded into an empire covering much of Europe.

- Under their great ruler, Charlemagne (reigned 768-814), the kinngdom of the Franks has expanded to take in Germany, central Europe, northern Italy and northeastern Spain (note 1).
- The fact that Charlemagne has taken the title of “emperor” (in 800 CE) has caused a rift with the Byzantine Empire (note 2).
- The Christian “Reconquista” of Spain has begun (note 3).

Additional notes:

Note 1: Charlemagne

Charles Martel, who we came across in the note 3 for the previous slide as the victor at the Battle of Tours, was the most powerful figures in France, but never became king. In 751, however, his son, Pepin, did become king, in 751. He continued his father’s policy of expanding the Frankish kingdom. He also formed a close alliance with the pope, and intervened in Italy to defend Rome from its enemies.

In 768 Pepin was succeeded by his son, Charles, known to history as “Charlemagne” (Charles the Great).

He has been a high successful military leader, who has added many new lands to the Frankish kingdom. His empire has come to include most of Western Europe (except Muslim Spain), all of Germany and central Europe, and northern Italy.

In December 800, Charlemagne had himself crowned emperor by the pope. His realm is known to history as the “Carolingian Empire”, from the Latin for Charles (“Carolus”).

Soldiers on horseback

Charlemagne's wide-ranging campaigns have favored the rise of mobile forces, made up of soldiers on horseback. From this time on, mounted, armored warriors begin to dominate the battlefields of Europe. In England, such soldiers would come to be known as "knights".

Charlemagne and the Church

Charlemagne has firmly believed himself to be God's servant. When he has conquered a pagan area (as in northern Germany), he has insisted - sometimes violently - on the local people giving up their pagan ways and becoming Christians.

Throughout his reign he has supported the pope's leadership of the Christian world; and for the rest of the Middle Ages the pope's position as the head of the Christian Church would not be questioned by most Christians in western Europe.

Charlemagne's court

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

Note 2: The Byzantine Empire

The Byzantine Empire has expanded its territory under a series of vigorous emperors.

This will be a repeating pattern - the Byzantine Empire did not just shrink and shrink; rather, it shrank, expanded, shrank, expanded - but each time shrinking more and expanding less.

Growing tensions with the West

The crowning of Charlemagne as emperor in December 800 has caused a rift with the Byzantines. They regard their own ruler, a successor to an unbroken line of Roman emperors, as the only true emperor within the Christian world.

Nor do they recognize the pope as the head of the Christian church. They regard their own senior bishop, the Patriarch of Constantinople, as their spiritual leader.

These tensions are made worse by the fact that the Western (Catholic) Church uses Latin in its worship and learning, while the Byzantine (Orthodox) Church uses Greek. Few on either side now understand each others' language. This makes misunderstandings more common.

Note 3: Spain

In northern Spain, the Christian kings have been able to take advantage of a civil war amongst the Muslims to grab some territory back. This is the start of the "Reconquista" of Spain by Christian forces, a process that will take several centuries to complete.

Slide 6: 900 CE

In Charlemagne's time, western Europe begun to come under attack from various peoples, causing widespread devastation and anarchy.

- The Vikings come by sea from the North, raiding coasts and sailing far up rivers and strike fear into local populations (note 1).

- At the same time, Arab raiders sail far and wide across the western Mediterranean, terrorizing Christian lands (note 2).
- Then in the last years of the 9th century, a people from central Asia called the Magyars begin carrying out massive raids, far into western Europe (note 3).
- These attacks, combined with civil war and the break-up of Charlemagne's empire, spread anarchy throughout western and central Europe (note 4).

Additional notes:

Note 1: The Vikings

By the time of Charlemagne's death in 814, western Europe had begun to experience the first attacks by sea raiders called "Vikings".

The Vikings are Scandinavian warriors who sail in their shallow but highly seaworthy ships, and are able to sail far inland up rivers. Few places in western Europe are free from the fear of their sudden appearance. They target monasteries, towns and villages, killing and enslaving local people.

They are also traders. They set up trading bases from Ireland in the west to Russia in the east. Many will later grow into important towns.

Note 2: Arab raiders

In this period the Mediterranean becomes virtually a Muslim lake, with raiders being able to strike at will. Large stretches of coast are completely abandoned, their inhabitants moving to hilly areas inland.

In these circumstances, trade between Europe and the East more or less comes to an end. Europeans are now cut off even more than they had been before from contact with the more advanced civilizations of the East.

Note 3: The Magyars

The Magyars are a nomadic people from the steppes of central Asia who have settled in central Europe, in what is now Hungary.

Like other nomadic peoples, their warriors fight on horseback, ranging hundreds of miles from their bases. They raid on a yearly basis, pillaging the countryside, killing or enslaving local populations, forcing local rulers to pay tribute (i.e. protection money), and destroying any Christian army sent against them.

Note 4: Anarchy in western and central Europe

In these circumstances, orderly government in western Europe breaks down. This is made worse by the power-struggles between Charlemagne's descendants, who between them have torn his empire apart.

These civil wars, plus the terrible attacks from Vikings, Arabs and Magyars, have led to widespread anarchy throughout western Europe. Local populations have been more or less left to fend for themselves. As a result, strongmen have emerged to dominate their localities.

These local lords live in a new kind of defensive structure called castles, and surround themselves with armed and mounted followers (the forebears of Medieval knights).

Slide 7: 962 CE

The great raids are subsiding, but Western Europe has been greatly affected by them. Local lords have emerged to fill the power vacuum left by weak kings.

- The anarchy of the last 100 years has led to the emergence of a class of local lords in western Europe. Kings have become much weaker than before (note 1).
- In the British Isles, the Saxon kingdom of Wessex has conquered the whole of England (note 2).
- In central Europe, a new state has appeared, which historians will come to label the “Holy Roman Empire” (note 3).
- Another new state has emerged in eastern Europe. This is the ancestor of modern Russia and Ukraine (note 4).
- The Byzantines are having to deal with a new foe. This is another people from central Asia, called the Bulgars (note 5).

Additional notes:

Note 1: Western Europe

Three leading kingdoms have emerged from the wreckage of Charlemagne’s empire, those of the West Franks (France), the East Franks (Germany), and Italy (which covers the northern half of Italy).

We saw in the last map how, during the anarchy of the ninth and early tenth centuries, local lords emerged to dominate their neighborhoods. They lived in castles and surrounded themselves with mounted, armed followers.

The process has gone furthest in France. Here, the kings have to negotiate with the local lords: in return for the lords’ support, the kings let them keep their newly-won local power, largely free from royal interference. Local lords are becoming feudal barons.

Note 2: England

No population has suffered more from the attacks of the Vikings than the people of the British Isles. Not only did the Vikings attack the English in many destructive raids, they eventually occupied a large territory in today’s northern England. One by one the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms fell to them, until only one was left. This was Wessex.

Under Alfred the Great (reigned 871-899) and his successors, however, the kings of Wessex have succeeded in reconquering the whole of England and uniting the country under their rule.

Note 3: The Holy Roman Empire

After the break-up of Charlemagne’s empire, the kingdom of the East Franks covered what is now Germany - in fact it soon came to be called the kingdom of Germany.

In 955 its king, Otto of Saxony, defeated the Magyars, and then seized control of the kingdom of Italy (which covered the northern half of Italy).

Otto had himself crowned emperor (962), and thus founded a new state which later historians would come to call the “Holy Roman Empire”.

Note 4: Russia

Viking traders and settlers have set up trading posts along the great rivers of eastern Europe. These trading centers have grown into towns, from which the Scandinavians have extended their control over the vast hinterland.

These towns have come under the authority of a single ruler, the Grand Prince of Kiev. This state is ancestral to two modern Russia and Ukraine.

Note 5: The Byzantines and the Bulgars

The Bulgars are a people who have migrated from the steppes of central Asia about 100 years before. They have settled in the Balkans, to the north of the Byzantine Empire, with who they are at war. They have recently defeated the Byzantines, and taken a large chunk of territory from them.

Slide 8: 1066

The emergence of powerful local lords has given rise to the Feudal System. This is now spreading from France into Germany, Italy and Christian Spain.

- By this time, this feudal system is spreading from France into Germany, Italy and Spain (note 1).
- The family of Christian nations - "Christendom" - has expanded strongly in northern, central and eastern Europe (note 2).
- However, the "Great Schism" has divided the nations of Christendom into two rival camps (note 3).
- England has been invaded by an army from Normandy, in northern France (note 4).

Additional notes:

Note 1: Feudalism

We have seen in the previous map that western Europe fell into chaos after the time of Charlemagne, and how this led to the rise of powerful local lords with whom kings had to negotiate for support. This laid the foundations for the rise of a system in which rulers, nobles and knights are bound together by duties towards each other. Many scholars give the term "feudalism" to this system.

By this time, this feudal system is spreading from France into Germany, Italy and Spain.

A pyramid of power

The feudal system is made up of a pyramid of power with kings at the top. Below them are dukes and counts who control large territories, then local lords (barons) who dominate a town or a number of villages, and below them are knights, who are lords of just one or two villages.

In this pyramid, inferiors ("vassals") have duties to their superiors ("lords"), such as providing them with military service and advice; but lords also have duties to vassals, such as protection and fair treatment.

Note 2: New Christian lands

In the period just before and after the year 1000, many tribal peoples in central, northern and eastern Europe convert to Christianity. The kings tend to take the lead in this, partly because literate Christian monks are useful in helping them organize their kingdoms along the lines of more established European kingdoms.

In this way, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Pomerania, Poland, Hungary and Russia all join the Christian family of nations ("Christendom").

Note 3: The Church divided

In western Europe, Christians have come to regard the bishop of Rome as the head of the church. As their spiritual father, he is increasingly called the Pope (*papa*).

The popes are considered the equal of secular ruler, and in spiritual matters, superior. They have in fact become secular rulers themselves, ruling their own territory in central Italy (the Papal States). The nucleus of this was given to them by Charlemagne, and they have expanded on this since then.

The Great Schism

The Latin-speaking Church of western Europe and the Greek-speaking Byzantine church have been drifting apart for many centuries, however. Above all, the Byzantine church has its own spiritual leader, the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Shortly after 1000, the popes began to assert their claim to be the head of all Christians, everywhere. This included Christians in the Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantines (who in a series of hard-fought campaigns have regained the territory they lost to the Bulgars) completely reject this claim. In 1054 the Great Schism occurs, when the pope and the patriarch excommunicate each other.

Russia

This schism has huge implications for the history of Europe. Increasingly, western Europe (under the "Catholic Church" led by the pope in Rome, and eastern Europe (under the "Orthodox Church" led by the patriarch in Constantinople) got their own way.

Most notably, in eastern Europe the Grand Princes of Kiev were converted to Christianity by missionaries from the Byzantine Empire. They therefore joined the Orthodox Church, rather than the Catholic Church. By now, the Kievan state has broken up into several principalities, but all have followed the Orthodox way.

This will profoundly influence all aspects of society and culture in the lands of Russia and Ukraine, down to the present day.

Note 4: The Normans

In 911 the king of the West Franks (France) allowed a group of Vikings (or *Northmen*, hence they came to be called Normans) to settle in an area of northern France (Normandy) on condition that they defended France from attacks by other Vikings.

Their leader was made count of Normandy (his successors later gained the higher title of duke).

Southern Italy

The Normans are known throughout Europe for being tough warriors. A group of Norman mercenaries travelled to southern Italy to fight in the wars there. They proved so successful that they have taking control of some territory for themselves and established their own small state.

England

More famously, in 1066 William, Duke of Normandy, has led a Norman army in an invasion of England. He defeats the main Anglo-Saxon army at the Battle of Hastings, and is crowned king of England on Christmas Day, 1066.

Within a few years, his French-speaking Normans would completely replace the old Anglo-Saxon aristocracy as the ruling class in England. They have imposed their strict form of feudalism on the native population.

Slide 9: 1100

The Christian kingdoms of Europe have been launching a series of military campaigns against the Muslims in Palestine. These are known to history as the “Crusades”.

- The First Crusade captured Jerusalem and Palestine from the Muslims, but later Crusades were less successful (note 1).
- During this period, a great quarrel broke out between the popes and the kings and princes of western Europe (note 2).
- All the states in western Europe have been seriously affected by this tension, but none so badly as the Holy Roman Empire (note 3).

Additional notes

Note 1: The Crusades

In 1071, a Muslim army inflicted a shattering defeat on the Byzantines at the Battle of Manzikert, and seized a huge amount of Byzantine territory. They then went on to capture Jerusalem, a holy city for Christians as well as for Muslims and Jews. Rumours were soon coming back to Europe that Christian pilgrims were being forcibly stopped from entering the city.

The popes called on the rulers in western Europe to win back Jerusalem. This led to several “Crusades” against the Muslims in Palestine. These were at first successful - the First Crusade (1096-1099) captured Jerusalem and Palestine from the Muslims and set up a group of states modelled on feudal lines, with kings, barons and so on..

Note 2: Popes against Kings

Popes have for long claimed spiritual authority over secular rulers. In the 1070s they begin to assert secular supremacy as well.

This sparks great tensions between popes and the secular rulers of western Europe. A particular flashpoint has been the question of who should appoint bishops and “invest” them with their badges of office.

Bishops are such powerful figures in all Christian kingdoms at this time that this controversy has had major impacts throughout Christendom.

Of all the states of Europe, this has affected the Holy Roman Empire the most.

Note 3: The Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire was originally composed of the former kingdoms of Germany and Italy, but has since expanded to take in other lands. It is too large, given the primitive state of Europe at this time, for one monarch to control such a large territory effectively. As a result, much power is exercised by regional dukes, counts, bishops and city councils.

The Holy Roman emperors have bitterly opposed the popes' insistence on appointing bishops and investing them with their badges of office (which might seem trivial to us today but in those days these badges - or *insignia* - had huge significance).

The popes have responded by (amongst other things) excommunicating them, thus encouraging the nobles and cities of Germany and northern Italy to oppose the emperors. The result has been a succession of revolts and civil wars, which have left the emperors' authority greatly diminished.

Slide 10: 1215

The Crusades have continued, but they have not been going well for the Christian forces.

- The Crusades have continued, but are less and less successful in holding onto their territory in Palestine (note 1).
- In western Europe, the Christians of Spain have been making headway against the Muslims, and France and England have seen tensions between kings and nobles (note 2).
- The economy and population of western Europe is now growing strongly (note 3).
- The Muslim and Christian worlds have come into closer contact with each other - and Europe is benefitting greatly from this (note 4).

Additional notes

Note 1: The Crusades

In Palestine, Muslims forces have little by little retaken more and more territory from the Crusaders. Jerusalem itself fell to the Muslims in 1187, after their decisive victory at the battle of Hattin.

The Byzantine Empire

The Byzantines had helped to launch the Crusades by pleading with the western Europeans for help when they were attacked by Muslim forces in the 11th century. Little good has it done them, however.

During the 12th and 13th century, relations between the Byzantines and the Crusaders turned sour. The Byzantines regarded the Crusaders as barbaric and thuggish, while the Crusaders regarded the Byzantines as arrogant and untrustworthy.

These growing tensions between Crusaders and Byzantines led to the 4th Crusade actually sacking Constantinople, the Byzantine capital, in 1204! In the aftermath, the Byzantine empire has temporarily been wiped off the map, with Crusader leaders ruling the so-called "Latin Empire".

Crusading Orders of Knighthood

The Crusades have resulted in the formation of several orders of knights, including the

- Knights Hospitallers, who specialise in running hostels and hospitals for crusaders and pilgrims on the journey to and from, and stay in, the Holy Land;
- Knights Templar, who raise troops and money for the Crusades;
- Teutonic Knights, a Crusading order aimed at supporting Germans involved in the Crusades;
- Knights of the Sword, or Livonian Knights, who have been formed recently to Crusade against pagan peoples in the Baltic region (part of the “Northern Crusades”).

These orders do much to develop the ideal of *chivalry*. According to this, Christian knights are expected, not only to be war-like soldiers, but also to treat the poor and less powerful members of society with consideration.

Note 2: Western Europe

The Reconquista in Spain

In southern Spain, the Muslim Caliphate has broken up into numerous small states, often at war with each other. This has helped the Christian kingdoms to the north to take more and more territory from the Muslims.

France

The kings of France have been strenuously trying to increase their own power at the expense of their nobles. They have therefore posed as defenders of church authority within their realm.

By so doing they have won the support of the popes and the church in their struggles to bring their magnates to heel. In this they have had some success.

England: Magna Carta

Since the Norman Conquest, kings of England have fought expensive wars to defend the lands they still hold in France. The current king, John, has resorted to extorting money from his barons to pay for his campaigns. They have rebelled, and forced him to sign an agreement to respect their rights.

This agreement is known as Magna Carta (“Great Charter”). It will in future become the foundation for citizens’ rights in English law (and in those legal systems which stemmed from it, like US law).

Note 3: Economic growth

Since the 11th century western Europe has been gradually recovering from the ravages inflicted by the Vikings, Arabs and Magyars.

The 12th and 13th centuries have been ones of comparative prosperity for Europe. Its population has expanded, trade has revived, and towns have been increasing in number and size. In particular, the trading cities of northern Italy, such as Venice, Genoa and Pisa, are now thriving commercial centers, as European trade expands in the Mediterranean.

Trade is making towns wealthier and more ambitious. Many cities in northern Italy and Germany have become self-governing republics, free from effective control by the Holy Roman emperors.

This period of prosperity is today reflected most clearly in the magnificent Gothic cathedrals that were built all around Europe during the 12th and 13th centuries.

Note 4: Increasing contacts with the Muslim world

The Crusades have brought the Christian world into closer contact with the much more advanced world of Islam. This has taken place not only in Palestine, but in other areas as well, notably southern Italy and Spain. In such places, Christians, Muslims and also Jews, whose communities can be found in towns and cities on both sides, intermingle peacefully with each other.

The Christian world is greatly benefitting from this. Islamic science (including advances in medicine and optics), Indian mathematics ("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) are now spreading through Europe.

Slide 11: 1242

Eastern and central Europe have experienced destructive invasions by the Mongols.

- In the 1240s a people from central Asia, the Mongols, launched destructive invasions of eastern and central Europe (note 1).
- In. Palestine, the Crusaders are being hard pressed by Muslim forces (note 2).

Additional notes

Note 1: Russia

In the 1240s a people from central Asia, the Mongols, invaded eastern and central Europe, leaving a trail of destruction. Hungary and Bulgaria saw half their populations perish.

The Mongol armies then returned to Russia. They do not return to central Europe, but they incorporate the Russian principalities into their huge empire, which stretches right across Asia to China and Korea.

Note 2: The Crusading movement

Palestine

The Crusader states have been increasingly pressed into an ever-narrower strip of coast. The Muslim forces have become increasingly well-organized and united, under a new line of rulers called Mamluqs.

The crusaders hold on for now. In about half a century (1291), however, the last Crusader stronghold in Palestine, the fortress of Acre, will fall to the Mamluqs.

Asia Minor

After the Byzantines had been driven out of Asia Minor by the Turks, a powerful Islamic sultanate had emerged, that of Rum (meaning "Rome", from the fact that it covered territory formerly belonging to the "Romans", as the Byzantines still thought themselves to be.)

Slide 12: 1346

Europe is being affected by many changes as the European Middle Ages enters its later phases.

- The Holy Roman Empire is coming to resemble a confederation of states rather than a united kingdom (note 1).
- In the Baltic region, large stretches of territory have been brought under the control of orders of Crusader knights (note 2).
- The Russian principalities remain subordinate to Mongol rule (note 3).
- In southeast Europe, the Byzantine Empire is now a mere shadow of its former self, while the Ottoman sultanate is becoming a leading power (note 4).
- In Spain, the “Reconquista” has by now won back all but a tiny portion of southern Spain from the Muslims (note 5).
- The Hundred Years’ War has broken out between England and France. This will have big consequences for both countries, as well as beginning a revolution in European warfare (note 6).
- Representative assemblies are now becoming commonplace in western and central Europe (note 7).

Additional notes

Note 1: The Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire has been experienced repeated bouts of civil war. This has further damaged the authority of the emperors. The Italian cities have effectively become self-governing city-states, and the leading German nobles are now turning themselves into semi-independent princes. The Holy Roman Empire is becoming increasingly like a confederation of states, under the fairly light leadership of the emperors.

Within a few years the “Golden Bull” (law) of 1356 will formalise this situation. It will confirm the magnates in their local privileges, in effect recognizing them as territorial princes, and require emperors be elected by a small group of leading princes (“electors”). These will ensure that only candidates who agree to interfere as little as possible in their privileges are chosen.

In fact, most emperors from now on will be chosen from one family, the Hapsburgs.

Note 2: Northern Europe

The “Northern Crusade” has resulted in the conquest of the Baltic coast by the Teutonic Knights and Livonian Knights - though the latter have been absorbed into the former. To meet the threat from the crusaders, the native tribes have formed themselves into the kingdom of Lithuania, and put up an effective resistance. This is the only non-Christian state within Europe.

Note 3: The Russian principalities

The Russians remain subordinate to Mongol rule.

Since the 1260s the mighty Mongol Empire has been divided amongst different branches of its royal family. The western portion, which rules Russia, is called the Golden Horde.

The Russian principalities are expected to pay a heavy tribute to their Mongol masters, but otherwise are largely left to run their own affairs. Nevertheless, the fact of being part of a vast empire which covers much of Asia means that the Russian people and their leaders are orientated eastward rather than westward. In this period they are almost completely cut off from the rest of Europe.

Note 4: Southeast Europe

After the attack on Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204, the Crusader leaders divided the Byzantine empire up between themselves.

The Byzantines soon rebelled against their new masters, and set up local regimes in Greece and Asia Minor. One of these conquered the others plus the remaining pockets of Crusader-held territory, recaptured Constantinople in 1261, and restored the Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantines have never been able to retire their empire to its former glory, however. This is largely due to the rise of a formidable new power from the East.

The Ottoman sultanate

In Asia Minor, the Seljuk sultanate state collapsed in the 1240s, to be replaced by a group of small Turkish emirates.

One of these, ruled by the descendants of a warrior-leader called Othman (hence it is called the Ottoman sultanate), expanded by conquering other emirates, plus large chunks of Byzantine territory, to cover western Asia Minor.

The Byzantines have been unable to offer the Ottoman effective resistance because they have had to focus on threats from the Bulgarians and Serbians.

Note 5: Spain

In the Iberian peninsula, the Christian kingdoms have expanded at the expense of the Muslim emirates. The Christian “Reconquista” of the peninsula has won back most of the territory lost to the Muslims five centuries before, with Muslim power confined to the single emirate of Granada, in the far south of Spain.

Note 6: The Hundred Year War

The Hundred Years’ War between England and France, caused by dynastic rivalries between the English and French royal families, has been raging since 1337. In this year, an English army joins a famous victory over the French, at the Battle of Crécy.

The English owed their victory to the longbow - a huge bow taller than a man and able to fire metal-tipped arrows with devastating effect over long distances. They could pierce even the heaviest armours. As such they provided the first real check on the superiority of the armoured knight on Medieval European battlefields.

Longbows took years of training to master, and laws in England required all able-bodied men to train in their use each week. Also, they were most effective when used from well-prepared positions, which limited their effectiveness. These therefore remained a specialist weapon in English armies.

Note 7: Representative assemblies

Various countries in western and central Europe are developing representative assemblies during these years. The *Reichstag* in the Holy Roman Empire, the *Estates-general* in France and the *Cortes* in the Spanish kingdoms are examples of these. None, however, will go on to achieve that central place in government which the English *parliament* would do.

English kings are beginning to find parliament a useful way of gaining widespread support for royal policies (especially waging war, which is becoming more and more expensive), and the taxation that these require.

Slide 13: 1352

A great plague known as the Black Death sweeps through Europe, killing millions of people.

- The Black Death arrived in Europe from central Asia (note 1).
- It is soon spread along the trade routes of Europe (note 2).
- Wherever the plague went it killed between a third and a half of the population (note 3).

Additional notes:

Note 1: The beginnings of the Plague

The Black Death arrived in Europe in 1346 from central Asia.

It had probably travelled from eastern Asia, along the great trading route across central Asia called the Silk Road.

So far as Europeans were concerned, it first appeared in Italian trading posts on the Black Sea. From there it was carried in ships to Constantinople, and thence across the sea to Mediterranean ports in other lands.

Note 2: The Plague spreads

It was soon spreading along the maritime and overland trade routes of Europe. Between 1346 and 1352, it arrived in towns and cities 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, often carried by townsmen fleeing their homes in panic.

Note 3: Death on a massive scale

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

Contemporary writings catch the sense of panic that gripped entire populations when the pandemic arrived. Its spread was eased by the filthy conditions in European towns at that time, with open sewers flowing down the centre of streets, waste thrown out of upper storey windows onto passers by, narrow streets, and houses crammed together - all encouraging disease to spread like wildfire.

Those who could, fled - carrying the disease with them. Bodies were thrown en masse into "plague pits", or, very often, left unburied. When it passed on, it left whole populations traumatized.

Slide 14: 1450 (I)

The past century has seen Europe affected by significant changes in the aftermath of the Black Death.

- The Black Death delivered a huge shock to Europe, and has caused deep social and cultural changes (note 1).

- France and England have been waging a series of wars with one another other, in an episode known to European history as the “Hundred Years War” (note 2).
- The map of Europe has been charged by the appearance of a huge new state in eastern Europe - Poland-Lithuania (note 3).
- The map of Europe is also being transformed by the rise of the Ottoman sultanate (note 4).

Additional notes

Note 1: The aftermath of the Black Death

The Black Death has led to deep social and cultural change in Europe. The shock caused by the plague has loosened the hold of old ideas.

Religious unrest

Many people, both inside and outside the church, criticize the Catholic Church for its wealth and corruption. The feeling is common that the lives of leading Churchmen has very little to do with the kind of life advocated by Jesus, the founder of Christianity. In particular, the popes have more like secular princes than spiritual leaders. Factionalism at the top of the Catholic Church has meant that there have sometimes two, even three, rival popes, each excommunicating the other(s).

Unsurprisingly, criticism of the church has become widespread. Churchmen such as John Wycliffe in England and Jan Huss in Bohemia gain large followings by the calls for people to live lives more in accordance with the Bible's teachings.

Social change

The feudal pyramid of Medieval European society contained kings and princes, knights and merchants, bishops, priests and monks; but it rested on a huge base made up of the majority of the population, the unfree peasants (“serfs”).

The immediate aftermath of the Black Death saw widespread economic dislocation. As things settled down, however, landowners and merchants had to compete for the work of the fewer peasants and laborers who now lived. The surviving workers therefore found themselves in a position to demand higher wages and better conditions.

The ruling classes tried unsuccessfully to resist these demands, and the tensions this provoked resulted in violent unrest. The most famous examples were the Jacquerie in France (1358) and the Peasants’ Revolt in England (1381).

In due course, however, the sheer power of economic forces has compelled landowners and other employers to yield to the laborers’ demands. The recurrence of the disease has kept population levels low in Europe, and demand for labor high. Workers’ demands for better conditions has hastened the end of serfdom in western Europe. Peasants are becoming free.

This is a major development in European history, but it is not the only one. Other changes are described in the next slide.

Note 2: The Hundred Years’ War

The Hundred Years’ War a whole series of wars, interspersed by periods of peace. A repeated pattern has been that the English invade France, win a spectacular victory (often due to their longbows), and then fail to hold on to the territory they have occupied, and are driven back by the French.

By 1450 the wars are coming to an end. The French have successfully pushed the English out of their territory (except for a tiny area in the north),

Parliament

In England, parliament has becoming a regular feature of the way English government works. This is largely because the great cost of repeatedly sending English armies to fight in France in the Hundred Years' War, has meant that heavy taxes have had to be levied on the country at regular intervals. Successive kings have felt it necessary to call parliaments, which include representatives from towns and counties, to gain support for their campaigns and the taxes to pay for them.

Note 3: Poland-Lithuania

The ruling families of Poland and Lithuania have united to create the dual kingdom of Poland-Lithuania.

This state has since expanded strongly at the expense of the Russian principalities. These have been handicapped by being still under the rule of the Golden Horde, whose leaders are pre-occupied with internal power struggles and are not very interested in events far to the west.

Note 4: The Byzantine Empire and Ottoman sultanate

The Byzantine Empire has never regained the power it had before the Muslim conquest of Asia Minor in the 1070s, and has shrunk to a tiny fraction of its former self.

The Ottoman sultanate, on the other hand, has continued to expand. It has conquered western Asia Minor and expanded far up into southeastern Europe. Within a few years (1456) it will capture the historic city of Constantinople itself. This will bring a final end to the Roman Empire!

The Ottoman Empire will go on to become a major European power.

Slide 14: 1450 (II)

New developments are ushering Europe into a new era.

- In Italy a cultural movement has begun which will revolutionize the way European intellectuals look at the world.
- In Portugal, the first European voyages of discovery are taking place.
- Gunpowder weapons are appearing on the battlefields of Europe - these will not only change warfare for ever.

Additional notes

Note 1: The Italian Renaissance

After recovering from the Black Death, the city-states of northern Italy renewed their strong economic growth. They are now home to a cultural movement known as the "Italian Renaissance".

Partly due to the psychological drama of the Black Death, the artists and thinkers in these cities are breaking free from Medieval modes of thought, and look to ancient Greece and Rome for inspiration. This affects all cultural fields, from art through to philosophy, law and science.

The Renaissance is sparking a period of great intellectual restlessness in Europe, with old ideas being questioned and new ideas being proposed.

Note 2: Voyages of Discovery

Since the early 15th century, a Portuguese prince called Henry “the Navigator” has been organising voyages of discovery down the coast of Africa. Their aim is to reach the source of the gold, which they have seen arriving along trade routes from south of the Sahara Desert.

Portuguese explorers have already reached lands completely new to Europeans, along the coast of tropical West Africa - and this is only the beginning.

Note 3: Gunpowder warfare

The Hundred Years War showed that the days of aristocratic knights are drawing to a close. In major battles, ordinary men armed with pikes or longbows massacred heavily-armed mounted knights.

More importantly, the wars have seen the first use of gunpowder weapons in European warfare. These had probably been brought to Europe from China by 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 stage was set for the old feudal nobility to be brought under firm royal control. This would be a major theme of the next phase of European history.

Questions

You may like to print these questions out.

1. What was the official religion of the Late Roman Empire?
2. What great city was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire?
3. Which figure did the Christian church in western Europe look to for spiritual leadership?
4. Which country in western Europe was occupied by Muslim Arabs in the early 8th century CE?
5. What great Frankish king conquered a large part of western Europe and was crowned emperor in 800 CE?
6. Which people from northern Europe began raiding the coasts of Britain and other countries at the end of the 8th century?
7. What is the large state in eastern Europe which has been created by Viking settlers and traders?
8. What large state in central Europe was founded in 962 CE?
9. What was the label which Europeans used to describe the family of nations which made up Europe?
10. The anarchy of the 9th and 10th centuries gave rise to a distinct social-political structure in western Europe - what was this called?
11. The Church in Europe was divided into two main branches - name one of these?
12. Who was the leading figure in the Christian church in western Europe?
13. What is the name given to an area of northern France originally granted to a Viking leader and his followers?
14. Which country do the Normans, under their duke William, invade in 1066?
15. Name one of the wealthy trading cities of northern Italy.
16. By what name are a series of religiously inspired campaigns known, whose aim was to capture Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims?
17. What was the agreement called which was made between king John of England and his nobles in 1215?
18. What people from central Asia conquered Russia and devastated central Europe in the mid-13th century?
19. What government institution makes its appearance in England in the late 13th century?
20. By what name is the long series of wars in Spain between Christians and Muslims known?
21. What is the name given to the pandemic which swept Europe in the mid-14th century?

22. By what name is the long struggle between England and France in the 14th and 15th centuries known?
23. What was the Muslim sultanate which started conquering Byzantine territory and grew powerful in the Balkans in the 14th and 15th centuries?
24. What was the cultural movement which emerged in Italy in the 14th and 15th centuries?

Further Reading

A list of all TimeMaps articles for Period 3 can be found on the Encyclopedia home page. Here is a selected list of the key articles which students should find most helpful:

[The Later Roman Empire](#)

[The Byzantine Empire](#)

[Medieval Europe - Overview](#)

[Medieval Europe - The Church](#)

[Medieval Europe - Economy](#)

[Medieval Europe - Feudalism](#)

[Medieval Europe - Government and warfare](#)

[The Islamic Caliphate](#)

[The Ottoman empire](#)

[The Mongol empire](#)

[Imperial Russia](#)

[Early Modern Europe](#)²⁵