

CHAPTER 8

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE FEUDAL AGE

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The empire of Charlemagne did not long survive his death. As his grandsons divided their vast inheritance, Europe was attacked from all sides by ferocious warriors. Political decentralization aggravated by devastating raids threatened to destroy the fabric of society. New forms of military and social organization arose to combat the threat and gradually hardened into the system known as feudalism. Feudalism rested upon the far older social and economic system known as manorialism, which, though it had existed in Roman times, adapted to feudal circumstances and expanded enormously during the dark years of the ninth and tenth centuries. Together, feudalism and manorialism became the dominant institutions of medieval Europe and profoundly influenced the development of politics and social attitudes until well into modern times. Although feudalism pervaded most of what had been the Carolingian Empire and spread eventually to England and southern Italy, many parts of the subcontinent escaped its grasp.



The Great Raids of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries

Even before the death of Charlemagne, reports reached him that trouble was brewing along the borders of his empire. Muslim raiders, sailing out of their North African ports in search of slaves and booty, had begun to harry the Mediterranean coasts. In the north the dragon prows of Viking longships made an unwelcome appearance in seacoast villages. The northmen came to trade if a village were well defended and to loot if it were not. By the middle of the ninth century these first tentative incursions had become massive raiding expeditions that threatened the survival of European life. Some years later the Magyars, a nation of horsemen whose origins lay in the steppes of central Asia, pastured their herds on the rich grasses of the



Illustration 8.1

/// **Viking Longship.** This Viking longship has elegant, and seaworthy, lines. The general impression is one of both beauty and menace.

rivers. From the western branch of the Dvina, which flows into the Baltic at Riga, they were able to reach the headwaters of both the Dnieper and the Volga and to float from there to the gates of Constantinople. In the process they founded Novgorod and established themselves as the ruling aristocracy at Kiev, but they had little impact upon what was to remain a thoroughly slavic culture. Somewhat ironically, they gave Russia its name: "Rus" or "Rhos" was the slavic word for Viking.

The establishment of these Viking enclaves, like the contemporary colonization of Iceland and Greenland and the exploration of the North American coast by Bjarni Herjolfsson (c. 986) and Leif Ericsson (c. 1000), indicates that hunger for arable land was an important reason for the great raids. In the two centuries between 850 and 1050 the North Sea became the center of a cosmopolitan society in which interaction between Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian cultures grew increasingly complex. The Norsemen were even-

tually assimilated as the medieval kingdoms of France and England evolved, but their incursions had helped to provoke a reorganization of European society.



The Emergence of Feudal Institutions

The great raids, whether Muslim, Magyar, or Viking, brought something like anarchy to most of Europe. The normal bonds of social interaction were submerged in an orgy of violence. No one's person or property was safe. Agricultural production fell, and the tenuous lines of trade and communication that held the empire together were virtually severed (see document 8.1).

The raids were inflicted on a political order that was in the process of disintegration. The empire of Charlemagne had been doomed from the start by poverty and by the problem of distance. Little surplus wealth was available to support either war or governance. Harvests, never abundant in the Carolingian age, may have declined even before the destructive effects of the raids were felt. The European climate had entered one of its cold, damp cycles, and yields of one-

◆ DOCUMENT 8.1 ◆

The Great Raids

The following is extracted from the Annals of Xanten, a chronicle thought to have been written in the archdiocese of Cologne at about the time of the events it describes. The year is 846, with the final sentence coming from the entry for 847. Frisia includes most of the northern Netherlands and the coastal region of northwest Germany. Lothaire was the grandson of Charlemagne who ruled the middle part of his empire known as Lotharingia. The passage reveals the sense of helplessness and isolation induced by disasters on every front.

According to their custom the Northmen plundered Eastern and Western Frisia and burned the town of Dordrecht with two other villages, before the eyes of Lothaire, who was then in the castle of Nimwegen, but could not punish the crime. The Northmen, with their boats filled with immense booty, including both men and goods, returned to their own country.

At the same time, as no one can mention or hear without great sadness, the mother of all churches, the basilica of the apostle Peter, was taken and plundered by the Moors or Saracens, who had already occupied the region of Beneventum. The Saracens, moreover, slaughtered all the Christians whom they found outside the walls of Rome, either within or without this church. They also carried men and women away prisoners. They tore down, among many others, the altar of the blessed Peter, and their crimes from day to day bring sorrow to Christians. Pope Sergius departed life this year.

After the death of Sergius no mention of the apostolic see has come in any way to our ears.

Robinson, James Harvey, ed. *Readings in European History*, vol. 1. Boston: Ginn, 1904.

and-a-half grains for every seed planted were probably normal. Distances were huge and major population centers were connected, as they would be for centuries to come, by primitive tracks. Local magnates and local loyalties began to assert themselves while Charlemagne was still alive. Neither his lines of communication nor his military resources were able to hold them fully in check. After his death the division of the empire among his three grandsons only made matters worse.

Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious (reigned 814–840) had hoped to pass on the empire intact, though the Salic law required that it be split equally among his heirs. He had three sons by his first marriage: Lothair, Pepin, and Louis "the German." A fourth son, Charles "the Bald," was born to his second wife, Judith of Bavaria, in 823. Lothair was the intended heir, but Judith instigated a civil war among the brothers in the hope of securing a kingdom for her son. After the emperor's death in 840, the surviving heirs divided his lands by the Treaty of Verdun (843). Lothair took the central portion including Italy, the Rhineland, and the Low Countries. Charles (d. 877) held most of what is now France, and Louis (d. 875) was given Bavaria, Austria, and the eastern part of Germany. Pepin had died in 838. When Lothair died in 855 the middle kingdom was divided again among his three sons and quickly ceased to be a major factor in European politics. By 870 transalpine Europe was divided into a West Frankish kingdom (France) under Charles, and an East Frankish kingdom (Germany) under Louis, while Italy became the playground of regional factions and Byzantine generals.

None of these states possessed the resources to mount a credible defense against the raiders. Cash remained scarce, and the kings that followed Charles the Bald and Louis the German were not always inspiring leaders. Militarily, the problem was not unlike that faced by the Roman emperors in the second and third centuries, but its scale was far greater and complicated by the decentralization of political power within the empire. Each of the successor kingdoms faced attacks along borders that extended for thousands of miles. The attacks might come by land or by sea. Their objective was unknown, and the size of the forces involved could not be anticipated. Post-Carolingian Europe was poor and sparsely settled. Peasant communities could not defend themselves against such formidable enemies as the Vikings, and the old Frankish system of levies was slow and cumbersome. By the time infantry was mobilized and marched to the point of contact, the enemy would be gone. Fortunately for the Europeans, Scandinavians and North Africans tended to fight on foot without benefit of the massed infantry tactics known to antiquity. The Magyars were a typical nomadic light cavalry. If they could be intercepted, all of these foes were vulnerable to attack by heavily armed and armored horsemen, the prototypes of the medieval knight.

From the technological point of view, the knight and his way of fighting was enhanced by



Illustration 8.2

A Knight and His Equipment. This manuscript illumination shows a knight wearing the conical helmet and long coat of chain mail or birney typical of the feudal period. He is shown at the charge with lance in hand. The high saddle made him difficult to unhorse, while the stirrups allowed him to stand up for greater impact.

two innovations: the iron horseshoe and the stirrup. Neither were in common use before the ninth century. The iron shoe permitted a horse to carry heavy weights over bad ground without splitting its hooves. The stirrup allowed an armored man to brace himself and even to stand in the saddle, which made it easier to wield a heavy lance, shield, and double-edged sword on horseback. The new system produced an increase in offensive power over that available to ancient or nomadic cavalry, while a heavy chain mail coat offered an effective defense against most edged weapons (see illustration 8.2). The Franks, with their skill in ironwork, could easily fashion the necessary equipment.

A defensive system evolved that was based on mobile detachments of heavy cavalry garrisoned in scattered strongholds or castles and supported directly by the people they were intended to protect. In theory, a band of horsemen could reach the site of a raid within hours or, at worst, a day or two. As hundreds of smoking villages continued to attest, this solution was not perfect, but it forced the marauders to pay a higher cost in blood than they might otherwise have done. With time and practice the knights became a reasonably effective deterrent.

The new system was also used in disputes that had nothing to do with the raids. The division of the em-

pire encouraged territorial disputes that continued even in the face of external threats. Armored knights could be used to harry the lands of a hostile neighbor. Other knights could be sent out to oppose them, but castles provided the more effective defense. The presence of a castle filled with armed men posed a serious threat to any invading force, and operations had to be suspended until that threat could be eliminated. For this reason sieges were perhaps more common in medieval warfare than pitched battles between mounted knights. Knights directed the sieges and played a prominent role in the fighting. The hard work of digging, undermining the walls, and manning the rams or catapults fell to peasants levied for the occasion.

A major defect of this kind of warfare was its expense. The cost of a horse and armor was roughly equivalent to that of two dozen cattle, and few could afford it. Charlemagne had begun to encourage the development of heavy cavalry, but the tiny elite that served him had to be supplemented under his successors by the enlistment of nearly everyone who was rich enough and strong enough to fight on horseback. Moreover, the kind of warfare in which they were engaged demanded constant readiness and a level of skill that was difficult to acquire and could be maintained only through constant practice. The construction and maintenance of castles required vast reserves of labor and materials. Even those who were able to afford the initial outlay could not be expected to support themselves indefinitely. In an age chronically short of cash, the most practical, and perhaps the only, solution was to provide these men with grants of land that could be set aside for their use in return for military service.

The term *feudalism* refers to the social institutions that arose from this exchange of land for military service. In its simplest form, a feudal bond was created when a fighting man placed his hands between those of his lord or liege and vowed to support him on the battlefield in return for a grant of land known as a benefice or fief. By so doing he became the lord's man, or vassal. The terms of such contracts varied widely and were the subject of much negotiation, but the basic principle of mutual obligation remained constant. A vassal was to support his lord and do nothing contrary to his interest; the lord was obligated to provide his vassal with personal and legal protection as well as material support. "Money fiefs," in which cash was provided in return for military service, existed, but in a virtually cashless society they were rare.

The precedents for such arrangements were ancient. In principle, feudalism is a form of clientage that

has been given sanction in law. In practice, the idea probably dates back to the oaths taken by members of a Germanic *conitatus* or war band (see document 8.2). The great men of Visigothic Spain and Merovingian Gaul had maintained bodies of armed companions who were pledged to them by oath. Some of them were free, but others were *vassi* who had entered into contractual relationships of dependency. Under the early Carolingians, the term began to lose its humble connotations. Charles Martel and his successors sometimes granted land to their retainers, who often became great lords in their own right. Charlemagne tried to make such arrangements legally binding, but the legal union of vassalage and benefice was achieved only in the reign of his son, Louis the Pious. By this time, the term *vassal* had lost all taint of servility.

In the dark years after Louis's death, feudalism spread throughout the Frankish kingdoms. Vassal homage was extended not only to household companions but also to regional magnates whose military assistance was valued. Bishops and abbots, though they were not supposed to shed blood, became vassals as well because for most purposes little difference existed between secular and ecclesiastical lordships. Monasteries and episcopal sees had long been endowed with "temporalities" or grants of land that in difficult times required the protection of armed men. A prominent churchman might therefore command a substantial force. In some cases, including most of those that involved the church, land was surrendered to the liege in return for his protection and then returned to the vassal after the oath of fealty had been taken. In most cases, the vassal received a new estate ranging in size from a few acres to an entire county, which might or might not contain a castle. The vassal was expected to make some provision for the security of his fief. When a fief was very large, this could be done only through subinfeudation. The vassal would recruit his own contingent of fighting men by offering them portions of his fief in return for their oaths of fealty. In this way the number of feudal jurisdictions increased rapidly within a few short years.

This decentralization of military force worked as well as could be expected. Its chief virtue was flexibility. Units of heavy cavalry based upon fortified strongholds were usually able to break up minor raids or at least to impose unacceptable casualties on the raiders. The building of castles, many of which were little more than halls surrounded by wooden palisades, was often a deterrent. Greater threats could be met by a general levy, which gathered the war bands of many vassals into a

DOCUMENT 8.2

The Act of Homage

Galbert of Bruges described this act of homage in 1127. The form is thought to have changed little since the beginning of the feudal age.

On Thursday, the seventh of the ides of April [April 7, 1127], acts of homage were again made before the count, which were brought to a conclusion through this method of giving faith and assurance. First, they performed the homage in this fashion: the count inquired if [the prospective vassal] wished completely to become his man. He replied, "I do wish it," and with his hands joined and covered by the hands of the count, the two were united by a kiss. Second, he who had done the homage gave faith to the representative of the count in these words: "I promise in my faith that I shall henceforth be faithful to count William, and I shall fully observe the homage owed him against all men, in good faith and without deceit." Third, he took an oath on the relics of the saints. Then the count, with the rod which he had in his hand, gave investiture to all those who by this promise had given assurance and due homage to the count, and had taken the oath.

Galbert of Bruges. "*Histoire du meurtre de Charles Bon comte de Flandre*," trans. David Herlihy. In David Herlihy, ed., *The History of Feudalism*, p. 98. New York: Walker, 1970.

great host. Such an army, organized by Otto the Great (912–973), met and defeated the Magyars at the battle of the Lechfeld in 955.

Otto's victory ended the last major incursion from the east. His reign as king of the East Franks—he was crowned Holy Roman emperor in 962—marked the turning of the tide. The Muslims were driven from Freinet in 972, and the number of Viking raids began to decline even in the west. They ceased entirely after about 1030.

How much of this resulted from the new military organization and how much from other factors is hard to determine. The Magyars were clearly discouraged by Otto the Great, but they had already begun to turn away from raiding as they discovered the rich agricultural possibilities of the Hungarian plain. After 950 the

Muslims were increasingly distracted by a series of civil wars. The hard work of dislodging them from their bases in Spain and the Balearics was for the most part undertaken by naval forces based on the Italian towns, not by feudal levies. Relative security was achieved in the western Mediterranean only by the end of the eleventh century.

The Vikings, too, may have returned home for reasons of their own. Even as they raided, the Scandinavian chiefs fought for hegemony among themselves. Much of the treasure they seized was used to buy influence and hire mercenaries for their dynastic quarrels. By the beginning of the eleventh century, this process had created the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The new rulers sought divine sanction by adopting Christianity and did everything in their power to monopolize the use of military force. Freebooting was actively discouraged because it led to the creation of alternative centers of power. The church condemned freebooting because it was directed against Christians. In the meantime, agricultural productivity seems to have improved, allowing reformed Vikings to accept the new policy without too much hardship.

The Consolidation of Feudalism: Subinfeudation and the Heritability of Fiefs

Feudalism did not guarantee the salvation of Europe, but in much of the subcontinent it altered the structure of society beyond recognition. An expedient adopted in a time of poverty and dire peril evolved into a complex of social and economic relationships that survived for half a millennium.

The process began with subinfeudation, which increased political decentralization and weakened the power of kings (see document 8.3). The bonds of homage and fealty were entirely personal. A vassal who held his benefice from a count owed nothing to the king. If a tenant-in-chief (a lord who held land directly from the sovereign) chose not to honor his obligations under the feudal contract, all of his subtenants could be expected to follow suit. Moreover, fiefs commonly were accumulated from more than one lord. Conflicts of loyalty were therefore inevitable, and some of the greater vassals used them to build a power base of their own. The counts of Flanders, for example, held lands from the kings of both East Francia and West Francia. They easily played one against the other to create what amounted to an independent state by the end of the ninth century.

Because feudal tenures were theoretically based on service and good only for the lifetime of the vassal, de-

DOCUMENT 8.3

Subinfeudation

This declaration of homage indicates some of the problems caused by subinfeudation as well as the kind of compromise that might, in theory, alleviate them.

I, John of Toul, make known that I am the liege man of the lady Beatrice, countess of Troyes, and of her son, Theobald, count of Champagne, against every creature, living or dead, saving my allegiance to Enjourand of Coucy, lord John of Arcis, and the count of Grandpré. If it should happen that the count of Grandpré should be at war with the countess and count of Champagne on his own quarrel, I will aid the count of Grandpré in my own person, and will send to the count and countess of Champagne the knights whose service I owe to them for the fief which I hold of them. But if the count of Grandpré shall make war on the countess and the count of Champagne on behalf of his friends and not by his own quarrel, I will aid in my own person the countess and count of Champagne, and will send one knight to the count of Grandpré for the service which I owe him for the fief which I hold of him, but I will not go myself into the territory of the count of Grandpré to make war on him.

Thatcher, O. J., and McNeal, E. H., eds. *A Source Book of Medieval History*. New York: Scribner's, 1905.

priving a disloyal tenant of his benefice should have been easy, but this was not the case. By granting their lands in fief, kings reduced their military force to a household guard that might be no more numerous than the companions of any major tenant-in-chief. Deprivation of one important vassal therefore required the assistance of others, and most were reluctant to participate in an action that could one day be applied to them.

Political pressures were moving strongly in the opposite direction. As the decentralization of military force increased, kings were forced to offer better terms in return for support. Fiefs inevitably became heritable. Vassals wished to provide for the security of their families, and the right to pass lands on to their children was demanded with increasing frequency in negotiating

feudal contracts. Rulers were reluctant to impoverish the widows and orphans of loyal vassals. The inheritance of fiefs was already common in France and Italy by the end of the ninth century and became universal in the eleventh. In Germany, heritability was at first applied only to the more important benefices. By the end of the twelfth century fiefs for life had become a rarity even there.

Heirs were supposed to renew their father's oaths and be capable of fulfilling them. In the early days, women were therefore denied the right of succession because they could not provide military service. Neither of these rules survived the first feudal age. Heirs frequently failed to appear before their liege but retained possession of their benefices. Women were inheriting fiefs in southern France before the end of the tenth century, and the practice spread quickly throughout the feudal world. Lords tried to ensure that the service aspects of the contract were fulfilled in these cases by a representative, usually the woman's husband, and used this as an excuse to intervene in the marriage plans of their female vassals. Such claims were frequently ignored. Matilda of Tuscany (c. 1046–1115) did not remarry after the death of her husband and became a dominant figure in Italian politics for almost forty years.

Alienation of fiefs for cash or other considerations was far more difficult to achieve than heritability, but it had become common by the twelfth century. Permission of the lord was still necessary if a fief changed hands, but the increasing frequency of such transactions indicates that the long process of transition to private property and a cash-based economy had already begun.

Private jurisdiction, or the establishment by vassals of feudal and manorial courts, was another matter. The practice of allowing great men to maintain their own law courts dates back to the latter days of the Roman Empire. Feudalism extended this benefit to nearly every vassal with subjects of his or her own. The right to preside over one's own court was commonly demanded by prospective vassals, and princes and tenants-in-chief were willing to accept it because their own courts could not cope with the proliferation of local disputes. Feudal society was contentious. A distinction was maintained between minor and major causes, the latter being reserved for royal or county jurisdictions. The proliferation of feudal and manorial courts inevitably weakened what threads of central authority remained.

Within a few short generations, feudalism had created a political system based upon decentralization and hereditary privilege. Though at first confined within

the limits of the old Carolingian Empire, feudal institutions were extended to England in 1066 and after 1072 to Sicily and southern Italy by the Norman expansion. In all of these regions, the permanence of the system was ensured by a tangled web of legal contracts and by the diffusion of military power among what had become a warrior caste.

The values and attitudes of that caste were increasingly defined by adherence to the ideals of chivalry. The term is derived from the French word for horse and reflects the self-conscious superiority of the mounted warrior. In the centuries to come the chivalric code would grow increasingly elaborate and its rituals would be fixed by a vast literature. Ceremonial initiations, designed to set the warrior apart from society as a whole, marked the creation of knights from the beginning of feudalism. They are not to be confused with the ceremony of vassalage but were the culmination of a long period of training and preparation. Boys of ten or twelve were usually sent by their fathers to serve as pages in the household of another lord. There they were trained in the art of war, including horsemanship and the use of lance, shield, and sword. Physical training was intense and consumed much of their time. The pages also learned fortification and enough physics to construct siege engines and other military devices.

Their first exposure to warfare was as squires who attended a knight on the battlefield, tended his horses and weapons, and protected him if he fell. When and if this apprenticeship was successfully completed the squire was dubbed a knight. In the early days the ceremony could be performed by any other knight and was usually concluded with a blow to the head or shoulders. Touching with the flat of a sword came later. In the Germanic world, the new knight was girded with his sword, a practice that probably dates from the knight-riding of Louis the Pious by his father, Charlemagne. Religious elements began to creep into these initiations by the middle of the tenth century and symbolized the growing sense that knights, like priests, had a divinely established vocation.

Feudalism and the Manor

A fief could support a fighting man only if someone were available to work it. As a general rule, knights did not till the soil even in the days before their status became too great to permit physical labor. They were on call whenever danger threatened, and their training normally required several hours of practice and exercise each day. Even hunting, which was their primary recreation and

which they always pursued on horseback, was a form of military exercise. The provision of labor was therefore a problem from the start, and the manorial system that was adapted to provide it grew hand in hand with the feudal institutions of the new aristocracy.

Manorialism as a means of securing scarce labor had existed since ancient times and would survive in eastern Europe until the nineteenth century. The basis of the medieval system was the manorial tenure, which in some respects paralleled the feudal tenures of the knights. In its simplest form, a peasant would surrender his allod or freehold to a lord in return for the lord's protection. The lord would then grant it back to him as a tenement with stipulations that made the tenant the legal subject of the lord. Those who possessed little or no land could also request protection, but their poverty placed them at a disadvantage in negotiating the terms.

The nature of manorial tenures varied widely. Although a tenant could remain technically free, in most cases tenancy involved a descent into serfdom. Serfs were unlike slaves in that they could not be sold and were entitled to hold property. They could also, within certain limits, negotiate contracts, undertake obligations, and testify in court. Both their land and their personal rights were contractually encumbered. Once they had placed themselves under a lord's protection, they were bound to their tenement for life and were often forbidden to marry anyone other than a subject of the same lord. Because they were legally subject to another person, they lost all political rights including the right to sue a free man in court.

Economically, the tenant was further obligated to return a portion of his annual crop to the lord or provide labor on the lord's lands for a fixed number of days per year or both (see document 8.4). Labor services might also involve maintenance work on the lord's castle or on the infrastructure of the manor, including roads, ditches, and other facilities. In some cases, military service was required, usually for a maximum of forty days per year between planting and harvest. Peasant troops were ineffective in a military environment dominated by heavy cavalry, but they could provide logistical support, dig trenches, and guard the baggage.

Another feature of these agreements involved services that could be provided only by the lord. The tenant accepted the jurisdiction of the lord's court and agreed to use only the lord's mill or the lord's animals at stud in return for payments in kind. Sometimes stipulations were made about access to orchards, woodlands, or streams. The right of tenants to hunt, fish, or gather fallen wood for fuel was strictly regulated. In return, the

lord agreed to protect the tenant and his property both physically and in law. Though manorial tenures were usually heritable, an investiture fee was commonly required from the heirs when a tenement changed hands.

Women rarely had the right to make such agreements in the first instance. If they were married, their legal rights were largely subsumed under those of their husbands and even their testimony in a peasant court was acceptable only in limited circumstances. They could, however, inherit tenements. In such cases military and labor obligations were fulfilled by substitutes who were usually paid in goods or services instead of in cash.

The sum of these burdens could be great or relatively small and might be compounded by tithes or other obligations owed to the parish church. Rents calculated as a portion of the total harvest were better from the peasant's point of view than those expressed in fixed amounts. Miller's fees and similar charges would have to have been paid in any case and involved only a theoretical loss of freedom because transporting grain or livestock to distant villages for milling or stud services was impractical. Labor services, meanwhile, could be onerous and were often deeply resented. In a society that was still largely illiterate, these contracts were not written down, and the precise terms of each tenure were submerged in the "custom of the manor." In later years the margin of survival for a peasant family often depended upon the negotiating skills of their ancestors.

The bargains struck between lords and peasants were unequal, but the harshness of the system was modified to some extent by the ideal of mutual obligation. In feudal Europe, land—the basis of nearly all wealth—was no longer regarded as private property. Peasants held their tenements from lords, who held their fiefs from the king, who held his kingdom ultimately from God. The terms by which land was occupied were spelled out in law and custom, and they could rarely be changed or abrogated without difficulty. Fiefs could not be sold at will, and tenants could not be dispossessed without cause. Moreover, lords were obligated to protect their subjects' property as well as their persons. Some were wise enough to take a paternalistic interest in the well-being of those who inhabited their estates. Whether a lord was good or bad, tenants enjoyed a measure of security that the wage laborers of a later day would never know. If the lot of a medieval peasant was hard, it was in part because the margin of subsistence was small and the contribution of any of it was more than most people could afford.

Generally, manorial tenures were accepted voluntarily. A peasant without protection was at the mercy of

◆ DOCUMENT 8.4 ◆

Manorial Obligations

John Cayworth was one of the larger tenants on the English manor of Bernholme in 1307. His obligations were correspondingly great and may be compared with the data in tables 11.1 and 11.2. This excerpt from the Customals of Battle Abbey provides a good example of how manorial tenures worked. Such agreements were almost never written down before the end of the thirteenth century, and it is doubtful if the monetary value of the obligations would have been calculated in this way before the widespread commutation of services for cash.

They say, moreover, that John Cayworth holds a house and 30 acres of land, and owes yearly 2s. at Easter and Michaelmas; and he owes a cock and two hens at Christmas, of the value of 4d.

And he ought to harrow for two days at the Lenten sowing with one man and his own horse and his own harrow, the value of the work being 4d.; and he is to receive from the lord on each day 3 meals, of the value of 5d.; and then the lord will be at a loss of 1d. . . .

And he ought to carry the manure of the lord for 2 days with 1 cart, with his own 2 oxen, the value of the work being 8d.; and he is to receive from the lord each day 3 meals of the price as above, and thus the service is worth 3d. clear.

And he shall find 1 man for two days for mowing on the meadow of the lord, who can mow, by estimation 1 acre and a half, the value of the mowing of an acre being 6d.; the sum is therefore 9d.; and he is to receive each day 3 meals of the value given above; and thus the mowing is worth 4d. clear. And he ought to gather and carry

that same hay which he has cut, the price of the work being 3d. . . .

And he ought to carry wood from the woods of the lord as far as the manor [house] for two days in summer with a cart and 3 animals of his own, the value of the work being 9d. And he shall receive from the lord each day 3 meals of the price given above; and thus the work is worth 4d. clear.

And he ought to find a man for 2 days to cut heath, the value of the work being 4d., and he shall have 3 meals each day of the value given above; and thus the lord will lose, if he receives the service, 3d.

And he ought to carry the heath which he has cut, the value of the work being 5d., and he shall receive from the lord 3 meals at the price of 2 1/2d., and thus the work will be worth 2 1/2d. clear.

And he ought to carry to Battle twice in the summer season, each time half a load of grain, the value of the service being 4d. And he shall receive in the manor each time 1 meal of the value of 2d. And thus the work is worth 2d. clear.

The total of the rents with the value of the hens is 2s. 4d.

The total of the value of the works is 2s., 3 1/2d., owed from the said John yearly.

"Customals of Battle Abbey." In Edward P. Cheyney, ed., *Pennsylvania Translations and Reprints*, vol. 3, no. 5, p. 30. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1902.

all sorts of armed marauders, including neighboring lords whose behavior was often no better than the Vikings'. Faced with the prospect of unending, uncontrolled violence, most people accepted their loss of freedom as a necessity. Instances of coercion by prospective lords were apparently rare and sometimes subtle. The manorial system was, like its feudal counterpart, a necessary adaptation to a world gone mad.

In physical terms, no two manors were exactly alike. Their character differed widely according to topography, agricultural practices, and local custom (see illustration 8.3). Some constituted entire villages of peasant huts with their household gardens and perhaps a church. Not every manor boasted a lord in residence, and the church sometimes served as a fortified refuge in

case of attack. Paths radiating out from the village provided access to fields, which might be divided from one another by narrow balks of turf. Where the iron plow (see chapter 10) was in use, the fields were laid out in long strips to facilitate plowing with draft animals. They were often worked in common because not everyone could afford a plow or a team. In lands cultivated by the old Roman plow, fields might be irregular in shape and worked only by the peasant family or its servants.

The lands of an individual tenement were not necessarily contiguous. The equivalent of between thirty and forty acres was the maximum that could be cultivated by a peasant family. Many plots were far smaller. With the passage of time and the vagaries of inheritance, farmers might find themselves holding

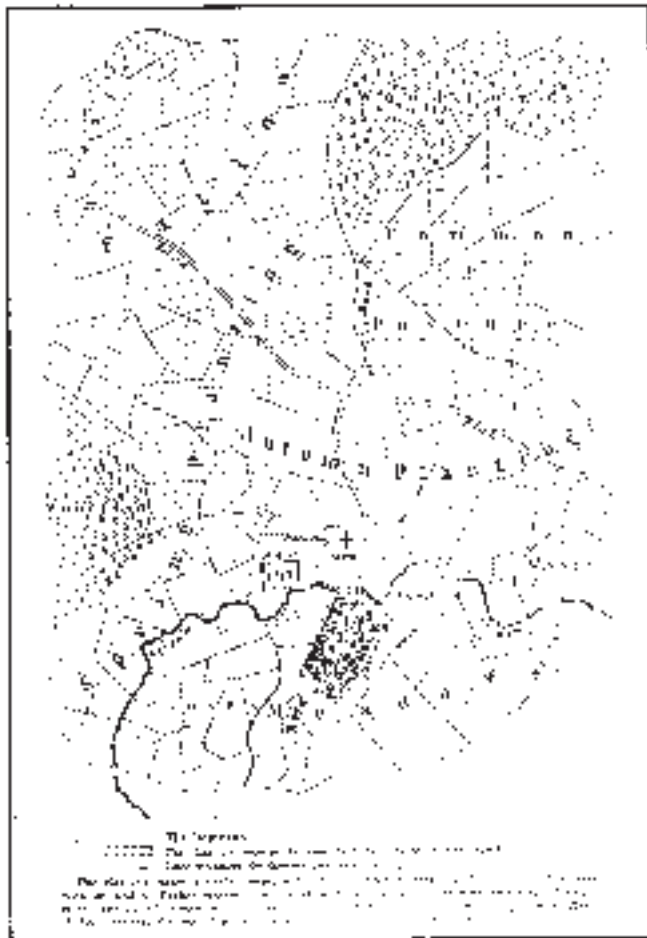


Illustration 8.3

Plan of a Medieval Manor. The drawing shows how a typical English manor might have been laid out. Not all manors were single villages of this kind in which all the inhabitants were subjects of the same lord.

fragments of land scattered over several square miles. Parcels of arable land might also be set aside for the lord and for the priest if there was one. Most communities also possessed common land that was available for allocation by the village elders.

Collection of the lord's dues and the maintenance of his property was typically in the hands of an appointed steward. The steward (reeve, *maire*, or *Bauermeister*) was originally a capable peasant who received lands, exemptions, or special privileges for his work on the lord's behalf. Such men almost invariably became wealthy, and in the later Middle Ages some of them were able to transcend the limitations of peasant status and acquire a coat of arms. Together with the *ministeriales*, the household officials who served the immediate needs of the lord and his castle, the stewards constituted an intermediate social class of some importance.

Few, however, were popular. Some were petty tyrants who extorted goods and favors from the peasants while embezzling from their lord. Even the best of them were powerful figures who had to be placated at every turn. In some regions they not only collected rents and dues, but also served as judges in peasant courts and determined the boundaries of tenements in case of dispute. In other, happier, places, these latter functions were assumed by the villagers.

Manors that contained one or more entire villages were the ideal because they were easier to administer and defend. In practice a manor was often spread through several villages with each village containing the subjects of more than one lord. This situation arose in Germany and parts of France because, in the beginning at least, peasants could sometimes commend themselves to the lord of their choice. In Italy and southern France the situation was further complicated by the survival of allodial holdings amidst the feudal and manorial tenures. A villager might own some of his land outright and hold the rest as a tenement from his lord. Only in England was the village manor almost universal.

Manorialism, defined as any system in which the tenants of an estate are the legal subjects of their lord, could exist without feudalism. Where manorialism and feudalism were combined, they produced a social and political system that was highly resistant to change. The knights had achieved a monopoly of both economic and military power and thus could impose the values of their class upon society as a whole.



Social and Economic Structures in Nonfeudal Europe

By the middle of the tenth century feudal institutions were dominant in what had been the Carolingian Empire. Another, nonfeudal Europe successfully resisted the new social order. Scandinavia, untroubled by raids or invasions, preserved the main features of its social structure and system of land tenure until well into the early modern period. Individual farmsteads, often located at a distance from the nearest village and worked by the owner's family and its servants, continued to be common. Slavery declined and eventually disappeared under the influence of Christianity. The houses, built of logs and connected to their outbuildings for protection against the winter, retained the sturdy simplicity of Viking days.

Until the Norman invasion of 1066 (see illustration 8.4) the Anglo-Saxons, too, were able to function

subsistence agriculture supplemented by hunting and gathering. Because they produced no surplus and were prohibited by geography from engaging in large-scale monoculture, they tempted neither the raiders nor the lords. They were also easily defended. Mounted knights were at a disadvantage in a largely vertical landscape, and narrow gorges were ideal sites for an ambush. Peasants of the high valleys found retaining their ancient freedoms relatively easy.

A rugged landscape also protected the remnants of Christian Spain. The situation in Cantabria and on the southern slopes of the Pyrenees was unique. The tiny states that survived the Muslim advance found themselves on a turbulent military frontier. Frankish influence brought feudalism to Cataluña, but the system that evolved in the northwest reflects a society that had begun, however tentatively, to take the offensive against *al Islam*. In the ninth and tenth centuries the kingdoms of Asturias, León, and Castile began to expand slowly at the expense of their Muslim neighbors, drawing back if the opposition became too intense, moving forward when a target of opportunity arose. Virtually the entire male population was militarized because warfare against the Muslims involved infantry and light cavalry as well as armored knights.

Advances were often achieved by individual nobles who were then free to keep the territory they conquered and rule it as they saw fit. Kings, however, reserved the right to grant and revoke titles at will. Feudal tenures were unknown, and private jurisdiction was strictly limited. Nobles placed themselves in *encomienda*, or commendation, to the crown, a term that was to have a different meaning in later centuries. Small landholders, who in this frontier society were usually free men and fighters, placed themselves in a similar relationship to the nobles. It was an exchange of military service for protection that might or might not involve a grant of land. More commonly it involved dues and services that created a *de facto* manor without the surrender of allodial property or of personal freedom. The *señorios* or lordships created by these arrangements were often vast. They were based upon a legal and political system unlike that of feudal Europe.

Spanish towns also played an important role in territorial expansion. Urban militias were established in the early ninth century and had become an important component of the Christian military effort by the tenth century. Whether they fought on their own behalf or under the direct orders of the king, towns were rewarded with booty and with royal grants whose provisions resembled those of the *señorios*. Large tracts of land

and many villages came under their control as peasants commended themselves to towns instead of to secular or ecclesiastical lords.

In northern Italy, towns were more effective as a barrier to feudal institutions, but for different reasons. Larger and richer than their Spanish counterparts, they could offer credible protection to their neighbors from the beginning of the feudal age. A patchwork of tenures developed in which allods, feudal manors, and urban jurisdictions might exist side by side in a relatively restricted space. The situation in some ways resembled that of southern France. The feudal component remained smaller, in part because the region was generally immune to large-scale raids. The south had been a region of large estates since Roman times. When Norman rulers imposed feudalism at the end of the eleventh century they substituted one set of lords for another while changing the legal basis of their holdings.



The Feudal Monarchies

This rapid survey of nonfeudal Europe reveals that, though feudalism was not universal, the disorders of the ninth and tenth centuries led to the growth of manorialism or other systems of collective security in all but the most isolated sections of Europe. A majority of Europeans were forced to renounce personal and economic freedom as the price of survival. Peasants who had formerly been free, slave, or *coloni* shared a common servility.

The impact of this change on everyday life should not be exaggerated. The correlation between personal freedom and political or social influence has always been inexact. The free Anglo-Saxon or Frankish peasant had often been subordinated as effectively by debt and by the threat of personal force as his descendants were by the custom of the manor, and he was subjected to taxes and demands for military service that could be as onerous as the feudal dues of a later period. Women had never been free in the sense that they remained the legal subjects of their fathers or husbands.

Moreover, the world that emerged from the aftermath of the great raids retained many distinctions of wealth and status, even among peasants. Servility was not incompatible with a secure and even comfortable life, while freedom could mean a hardscrabble existence on marginal lands. Those who remained free often did so because they inhabited malarial swamps or mountain crags unwanted by either knights or Vikings.

The conversion to feudal and manorial tenures seems more dramatic when seen in relation to its effect on social institutions and attitudes—the ties that bound society together. After the great raids, the gap between the vast majority of the population and the aristocracy that ruled them widened perceptibly. Social mobility was not only difficult to achieve but also generally condemned. Chivalric and ecclesiastical writers maintained that people should not attempt to rise above their class. Permanence and stability were valued by a society that had just emerged from two centuries of near-anarchy, but the longevity of feudal institutions was based only in part on the conservatism of those who had suffered much.

The apparent success of heavy cavalry in dealing with the crises of the ninth and tenth centuries had created a powerful myth of class superiority. The medieval knight believed in it and made it the basis of an entire way of life. His education, leisure activities, and ultimately the moral and aesthetic values of his class were grounded in the perception of himself as the armed and mounted protector of society—a perception that also gave him his chief claim to social privilege. By the end of the tenth century the conditions that created the knights had largely disappeared, but the knights were now in possession of the bulk of society's resources and could be neither displaced nor effectively controlled. Class divisions would henceforth widen and acquire a more elaborate ideological basis than they had formerly possessed. A system of military tactics that was not suitable for all occasions would be preserved until long after it had outlived its usefulness. Above all, the creation of a dominant social class whose power was based upon widely scattered estates would perpetuate the decentralization of political authority for centuries to come.

An immediate consequence of this decentralization was feudal warfare, disruptive and endemic, though not as devastating as the great raids. The warrior's sense of vocation, the development of a code of conduct based upon the ideals of honor and courage, and the emphasis on individual and corporate rights characteristic of feudal law all encouraged the lords to fight one another in defense of what they considered their honor and their right. The church sought to restrain these tendencies by encouraging the "Peace of God" movement. Councils or bishops issued decrees against wanton violence and tried to limit the fighting to certain days of the week. Such measures could achieve little. The political history of the age became in large measure an attempt to control the centrifugal tendencies of feudalism in the interests of public order.

France and Norman England

In northwestern Europe a protracted struggle between the kings of France and England was the legacy of Norman expansion. England fell to the Normans when Edward the Confessor died without heirs. There were three claimants to the throne: Edward's first cousin, William, duke of Normandy (c. 1028–87); Harald Hardrada, king of Norway; and the Saxon Harold Godwinsson. When the English Witan, or council, chose Harold Godwinsson, the new king found himself under attack on two fronts. He defeated the Norwegians at Stamford Bridge on September 23, 1066, and rushed south to meet William, who had landed near Hastings on the same day. Exhausted by the battle and by a march of almost three hundred miles, the Saxon army was crushed on October 14.

William was no friend of feudal decentralization. The fiefs he established in England were composed of manors in different parts of the country to prevent a concentration of power. He retained the Saxon office of sheriff or shire reeve, who collected taxes, administered the royal domains, and presided over the shire courts. In 1086 his officials produced a comprehensive survey of all English properties known as the Domesday Book (see document 8.5). Norman England was perhaps the most tightly administered monarchy of the central Middle Ages, but William's conquest gave birth to a political anomaly: The king of England was still duke of Normandy and vassal to the king of France for one of the richest provinces on the Continent.

The situation became critical in the reign of Henry II from 1154 to 1189. The development of the French monarchy had been slow and painful. In 987 the great French feudatories had elected Hugh Capet king, primarily because his small holdings in the region of Paris made it unlikely that he would ever pose a threat to their interests. The area was a hotbed of feudal anarchy, and the Capetian kings took more than a century to establish control. When Louis VI "the Fat" died in 1137, he left a small but powerful state in the Ile de France to his son Louis VII. Guided by his chief adviser, Suger, abbot of St. Denis, Louis VII tried to double his holdings by marrying Eleanor of Aquitaine (c. 1122–1204), the heir to vast estates in southwestern France (see illustration 8.5). The marriage was a disaster. Louis was pious and ascetic; Eleanor was attractive, witty, and a patron of troubadours. She apparently took the adulterous conventions of chivalric love too seriously, and the marriage was annulled in 1152 amid charges of infidelity with one of her cousins. The couple had two

CHAPTER 9

MEDIEVAL RELIGION AND THOUGHT

CHAPTER OUTLINE



- I. Introduction
- II. Monastic Revival and Papal Reform
 - A. The Investiture Controversy and Its Aftermath
 - B. The New Monastic Orders and the Building of the Great Cathedrals
- III. The Crusades: The Reconquest of Muslim Europe
 - A. The Struggle for the Holy Land
 - B. The Impact of the Crusades upon Europe
- IV. The Intellectual Crisis of the Twelfth Century
- V. Repression and Renewal (1215–92)
 - A. The Founding of the Universities
 - B. Scholastic Thought

The Latin church survived the fall of the Roman Empire in the west to become the major unifying element in European society.

Though it suffered from episodes of fragmentation and disorder throughout the early Middle Ages, it provided western Europeans with a common set of values and, through its universality and the preservation of the Latin language, with a measure of diplomatic and intellectual communication. With the passing of the great raids, the church gradually evolved into something more: a vast, institutionalized bureaucracy headed by popes who claimed full authority over a subordinate clergy as well as secular rulers. That authority was vehemently contested by the emperor and other princes, but all agreed that Europe, for all its divisions, was a Christian commonwealth ruled in theory by divine law.

The church of the High Middle Ages possessed vast wealth, political influence, and a virtual monopoly of thought and education, but its importance cannot be understood in purely institutional terms. Its values, sacraments, and holidays defined the lives of ordinary people in ways that are almost inconceivable today. While medieval people were neither excessively good nor moral, their personal identities and habits of thought were formed by near total emersion in Christian practices and categories of thought. The sacraments, from baptism to extreme unction, defined the stages of people's lives. They measured time by reference to the canonical hours and holidays of the church. They bound themselves by religious oaths that, to their minds, carried with them the real threat of eternal damnation, and they explained everything from politics to natural phenomena as an expression of God's will. In more concrete terms the church building was both the physical and social center of their communities and the most visible expression of communal or civic pride. Priests, monks, and nuns organized the distribution of charity, cared for the sick, and provided lodging for travelers in the great monasteries that dotted the countryside. Chapter 9 describes how the church evolved

from the dark days of the tenth century to the glories of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—the great age of cathedrals and crusades, of the founding of universities, and of scholasticism, a system of thought that retains its influence today.



Monastic Revival and Papal Reform

The disorder created by the great raids profoundly weakened the western church. Cut off from contact with each other and from Rome, bishoprics and monasteries fell under the control of secular rulers who could protect them. These lords then appointed political henchmen or their own younger sons to episcopal rank with little regard for spiritual qualities. Monasteries suffered the same fate. Even when a monastery retained its independence, isolation and the absence of supervision often led to relaxations of the rule. Lay people, who in this age tended to believe that their chances of salvation depended on the prayers of those holier than themselves, were scandalized and frightened.

The papacy shared in the general decline. As bishop of Rome, the pope was both spiritual and secular ruler of the city. From the deposition of Pope Nicholas the Great in 867 to the appointment of Clement II in 1046, a generalized state of anarchy permitted the great Roman families to vie for control of the office with only an occasional nod to religious priorities or to the wishes of the emperors. To the laity and to pious churchmen alike, the situation was intolerable.

A reform movement that would transform both the papacy and the medieval church began in the Burgundian monastery of Cluny. Founded in 910 by William the Pious, duke of Aquitaine, its community followed a strict version of the Benedictine rule that emphasized liturgy and vocal prayer. In the decades that followed its establishment the Cluniac ideal attracted those who sought a more spiritual and disciplined religious life. The original foundation became the mother house to nearly fifteen hundred affiliated monasteries.

The agenda of the Cluniac monks included more than prayer. They saw themselves as the vanguard of a broader reform that would enhance the spirituality of the church and free it forever from secular control. To achieve this, they sought to create an independent, reformed papacy and to restore episcopal subordination as a first step to rooting out corruption among parish priests and monks.

The reformer's first step was to gain the support of the emperor Henry III (1017–56), who agreed with many of their ideas and saw in them an opportunity to expand his own political influence. Henry entered Italy in 1046, deposed the three existing popes, and suppressed the Roman political factions that had supported them. He then used his authority to appoint a series of popes, the most important of whom was the Cluniac reformer Leo IX (served 1049–54). Leo condemned simony, or the sale of church offices, called for the enforcement of clerical celibacy, and brought with him to Rome a number of young men who shared his convictions.

Henry's actions brought improvement, but to the monks, a papacy under imperial control was only slightly better than one controlled by Roman politicians. In the confusion that followed Henry's death, the reformers achieved something like full independence for the papacy. Taking advantage of the minority of Henry's young son, Henry IV (1050–1106), Pope Nicholas II placed the election of all future popes in the hands of the College of Cardinals, an advisory body composed of the most important, or cardinal, priests of the Roman diocese. The first such election took place in 1061, and the basic procedure used on that occasion has remained more or less intact to this day.

The Investiture Controversy and Its Aftermath

The next step was to achieve papal control over the appointment of bishops. With the establishment of feudalism, bishops came to hold fiefs over which they exercised civil as well as ecclesiastical authority. The secular rulers whose vassals they became usurped the right to invest, or formally install, them as bishops. When Hildebrand of Soana, one of the men who had come to Rome with Leo IX, was elected Pope Gregory VII in 1073 he made the abolition of lay investiture his chief priority. The emperor, like all other secular authorities, was forbidden to invest bishops with ring and crozier, the symbols of their office, on pain of excommunication. To Henry IV, this edict was a serious threat, not only because it seemed to question the religious basis of imperial power but also because bishops were the temporal as well as spiritual lords over much of Germany. All hope of imperial consolidation, to say nothing of good governance, would be thwarted if such men were appointed by an outsider. To the pope, lay investiture prevented him from exercising full control over the church and seemed to guarantee that its

CHAPTER 12

PLAGUE, WAR, AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE "LONG" FOURTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- I. Introduction
- II. Famine, Economic Decline, and the Black Death (1315–50)
 - A. The Economic Consequences of the Black Death
 - B. Social Disorder from the Jacqueries to the Bundschuh Revolts
- III. The Transformation of Warfare: The Emergence of the Soldier
- IV. Centers of Conflict: The Eastern Frontiers
 - A. The Hundred Years' War in the West
 - B. Political Turbulence and Dynastic Collapse: France, Castile, and England
- V. Art and Literature: The Measure of Discontent

The transition from medieval to early modern times is generally thought to have begun in the fourteenth century when economic decline, plague, and endemic warfare weakened the bonds of feudal society and undermined its values. Great historical transformations rarely limit themselves to the confines of a single century, and this one was no exception. Thinking, therefore, in terms of a "long" fourteenth century is helpful; that is, of an extended period of demographic, social, and political stress that in some of its manifestations lasted until well into the fifteenth century and beyond.



Famine, Economic Decline, and the Black Death (1315–50)

The fourteenth century was marked by a series of economic and demographic crises that had a profound effect on the social structure of Europe. Local crises of subsistence became common and, for the first time in two centuries, a large-scale famine struck northern Europe in 1315–17 (see document 12.1). Southern Europe suffered a similar catastrophe in 1339–40. Overpopulation was the underlying cause. By 1300 only the cultivation of marginal soils could feed the ever-growing populace. A succession of bad harvests brought on by unusually cold, wet weather made these lands virtually unusable and destroyed the ecological balance between the people and their food supply. The result was widespread misery and an end to population growth. Scarcity pushed the price of bread to levels that only the rich could afford. Desperate peasants ate their seed grain, thereby destroying all hope for a harvest in the year to come. Others ate leaves, bark, and rats. Though adult deaths from malnutrition were probably rare, the demographic impact of the famine was seen in a declining rate of conception and increased infant mortality.

DOCUMENT 12.1

The Famine of 1315 in England

This dramatic account of the famine is from the English chronicler Johannes de Trokelowe. The prices may be compared with those given for the preceding century in document 11.1.

Meat and eggs began to run out, capons and fowl could hardly be found, animals died of pest, swine could not be fed because of the excessive price of fodder. A quarter of wheat or beans or peas sold for twenty shillings, barley for a mark, oats for ten shillings. A quarter of salt was commonly sold for thirty-five shillings, which in former times was quite unheard of. The land was so oppressed with want that when the king came to St. Albans on the feast of St. Lawrence [August 10] it was hardly possible to find bread on sale to supply his immediate household. . . .

The dearth began in the month of May and lasted until the nativity of the Virgin [September 8]. The summer rains were so heavy that grain could not ripen. It could hardly be gathered and used to make bread down to the said feast day unless it was first put in vessels to dry. Around the end of autumn the dearth was mitigated in part, but toward Christmas it became as bad as before. Bread did not have its usual nourishing power and strength because the grain was not nourished by the warmth of summer sunshine. Hence those who had it, even in large quantities, were hungry again after a little while. There can be no doubt that the poor wasted away when even the rich were constantly hungry. . . .

Four pennies worth of coarse bread was not enough to feed a common man for one day. The usual kinds of meat, suitable for eating, were too scarce; horse meat was precious; plump dogs were stolen. And according to many reports, men and women in many places secretly ate their own children.

Trokelowe, Johannes. “*Annales*,” trans. Brian Tierney. In Brian Tierney, ed., *Sources of Medieval History*, 4th ed. New York: Knopf, 1983.

Predictably, trade declined. Defaults on loans increased, and the banking system came under stress. The great international banks still controlled their branches directly and had unlimited liability for their losses. If a

branch failed it created a domino effect that might bring down the entire structure. This happened in 1343 when the two leading Florentine banks—the Bardi and the Peruzzi—failed, setting off a widespread financial panic. The immediate cause of their failure was the repudiation of war debts by a major borrower, Edward III of England, but both banks had been gravely weakened before the final blow.

The Black Death struck in 1347–51. Endemic in Asia since the eleventh century, the disease first entered Europe through the Mediterranean ports and spread with terrifying speed throughout the subcontinent. Following the trade routes it reached Paris in the summer of 1348, Denmark and Norway in 1349, and Russia in 1351. Estimates are that within four years a third of the population of Europe died. It was the greatest demographic catastrophe in European history, and its ravages did not end with the first virulent outbreak. Subsequent epidemics occurred regularly in every decade until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Given that immunity apparently cannot be transmitted from generation to generation, the plague served as a long-term check on population growth, and most countries required more than two centuries to recover the population levels they had in 1300 (see table 12.1).

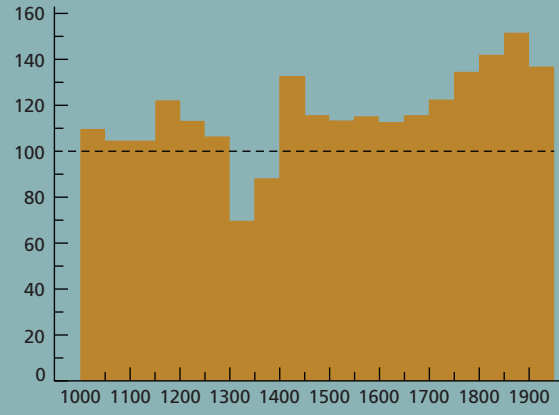
The relationship, if any, between the plague and poverty or malnutrition is unclear. In its most common form, bubonic plague is spread by fleas, which are carried by rats and other small mammals. A pneumonic form of the plague is spread by coughing. The onset of either form is rapid, and death usually comes within three days (see illustration 12.1). The mortality rate seems to have been about the same for all who contracted the disease, so that lowered resistance as a result of malnutrition likely did not play an important part in its spread. At the same time, death came most frequently to those who lived in crowded conditions. Soldiers, ship’s crews, and the urban poor were at greatest risk, followed by those country folk whose poverty forced them to huddle together in their one-room cottages for warmth. The rich often escaped, either because they lived in more sanitary conditions or because, like the characters in Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, they had the means to flee from the centers of population (see document 12.2).

No one knew what caused the plague. Most probably believed that it was a visitation from God and took refuge in prayer and religious ceremonies. Flagellants paraded from town to town, beating each other with metal-tipped scourges in the hope of averting God’s wrath, while preachers demanded the reform of the

TABLE 12.1

Indices of Population Increase in Europe,
1000–1950

The data presented in this table show the dramatic effects of the Black Death as well as the substantial increases in the European population between 1150 and 1250 and between 1400 and 1450. The indices are based on the figures for 100 (that is 1000 = 100). These figures are estimates only and have proved controversial.



Indices per period of fifty years

Period	Index	Period	Index
1000–50	109.5	1500–50	113.0
1050–1100	104.3	1550–1600	114.1
1100–50	104.2	1600–50	112.4
1150–1200	122.0	1650–1700	115.0
1200–50	113.1	1700–50	121.7
1250–1300	105.8	1750–1800	134.3
1300–50	69.9	1800–50	141.5
1350–1400	88.2	1850–1900	150.8
1400–50	133.3	1900–50	136.7
1450–1500	115.0		

Source: B. H. Slicher van Bath, *The Agrarian History of Western Europe, A.D. 500–1800*, trans. Olive Ordish (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), p. 79.

DOCUMENT 12.2

The Symptoms of the Plague

A description of the Black Death survives from one of the greatest of the late medieval writers. In 1348–53 Giovanni Boccaccio, who would later become a founder of Renaissance humanism (see chapter 13), wrote the *Decameron*, a series of stories told in a villa outside Florence where a group of fashionable young people take refuge from the plague. The book begins with a description of the epidemic.

In the year of our Lord 1348, there happened at Florence, the finest city in all Italy, a most terrible plague; which, whether owing to the influence of the planets, or that it was sent from God as a just punishment for our sins, had broken out some years before in the Levant, and after passing from place to place, and making incredible havoc all the way, had now reached the west. There, in spite of all the means that art and human foresight could suggest, such as keeping the city free from filth, the exclusion of all suspected persons, and the publication of copious instructions for the preservation of health; and notwithstanding manifold humble supplications offered to God in processions and otherwise; it began to show itself in the aforesaid year, and in a sad and wonderful manner. Unlike what had been seen in the east, where bleeding from the nose is the fatal prognostic, here there appeared certain tumors in the groin or under the armpits, some as big as a small apple, others as an egg; and afterwards purple spots in most parts of the body; in some cases large and but few in number, in others smaller and more numerous—both sorts the usual messengers of death. To the cure of this malady, neither medical knowledge nor the power of drugs was of any effect; whether because the disease was in its own nature mortal, or that the physicians (the number of whom, taking quacks and women pretenders into the account, was grown very great) could form no just idea of the cause, nor consequently devise a true method of cure; whichever was the reason, few escaped; but nearly all died the third day from the first appearance of the symptoms, some sooner, some later, without any fever or accessory symptoms.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. "The Decameron." In *Stories of Boccaccio*, p. 1, trans. John Payne. London: The Bibliophilist Society, 1903.



Illustration 12.1

/// The Burial of Plague Victims at Tournai, 1349. Tournai is located in what is now Belgium. Similar scenes of mass burial were replayed throughout Europe during the plague years. As the death toll increased, attempts to provide coffins and individual funerals had to be abandoned. The overwhelmed survivors could only dump the bodies in mass graves.

church on the theory that its increasing interest in secular affairs had provoked divine retribution. Some have argued that the plague created a genuine and long-lasting demand for spiritual renewal. However, other, more sinister results were evident as well. In parts of Germany whole communities of Jews were burned alive because they were thought to have spread the disease by poisoning wells.

The Economic Consequences of the Black Death

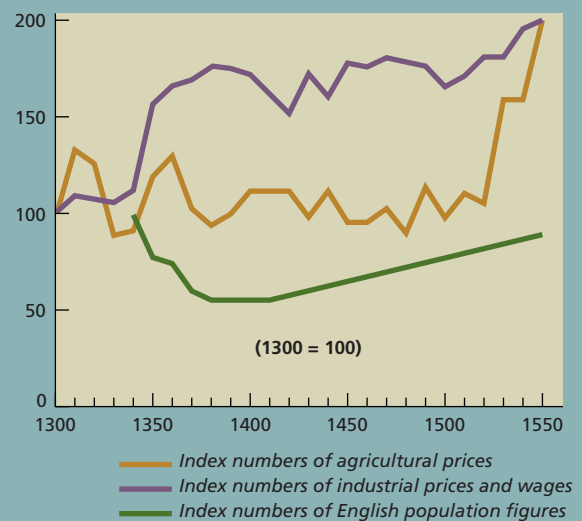
The psychological effects of the Black Death would have a profound impact on religious belief, but its material consequences were equally dramatic (see table 12.2). Demographic collapse relieved pressure on the land. Food prices dropped immediately. Land values and rents followed close behind, declining by 30 to 40 percent in most parts of Europe between 1350 and 1400. For landholders, both lay and religious, this was a serious loss; for ordinary men and women, it was a windfall. Stunned by the horror they had experienced, the survivors found not only that food was cheaper and land more abundant, but also that most of them had inherited varying amounts of property from their dead relatives.

The delicate ecological balance of the thirteenth century no longer existed. Acreage could be diverted to pursuits that were less efficient in purely nutritional terms, but more profitable and less labor intensive. Fields were converted to pasture for grazing sheep and cattle. Marginal lands in Germany and elsewhere reverted to forest where hogs could root at will and where the next generation of peasants could presumably find

TABLE 12.2

Population, Prices, and Wages in England, 1300–1500

The information presented in this graph shows the relationship of agricultural prices, industrial wages and prices, and population in the century and a half following the Black Death. After dramatic rises during the crises of 1315–17 and in the decade of the 1360s, agricultural prices remained fairly steady until the 1530s. The graph is much simplified, and the index numbers are based on prices, wages, and population in 1300.



Source: E. Perroy, “Les crises du XIVe siècle,” *Annales*, vol. 4 (1949): pp. 167–82, as adapted in B. H. Slicher van Bath, *The Agrarian History of Western Europe, A.D. 500–1800*, trans. Olive Ordish (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), p. 139.

CHAPTER 15

OVERSEAS CONQUEST AND RELIGIOUS WAR TO 1648

CHAPTER OUTLINE



- I. Introduction
- II. The Portuguese Voyages to Africa, India, and Brazil
- III. Columbus and the Opening of America
- IV. The First Colonial Empires: Portugal and Spain
- V. A Clash of Empires: The Ottoman Challenge and the Emperor Charles V
- VI. The Crisis of the Early Modern State
 - A. The French Wars of Religion and the Revolt of the Netherlands
 - B. The Thirty Years' War
 - C. The English Civil War
- VII. The Price of Conflict: Fiscal Crisis and Administrative Devolution

The age of the Renaissance and Reformation marked the beginning of European conquests overseas. Their purpose in the first instance was to expand the resources available to the emerging monarchies of western Europe. The conquests were therefore an extension of the state-building process, but a religious motive was evident, too, which at times recalled the Christian triumphalism of the Crusades. To say that European expansion overseas changed the world forever is an understatement. Though it laid the foundations of a world market and added much to Europe's store of wealth and knowledge, it did so at a terrible cost in human misery.

In Europe itself, the rivalries that encouraged overseas exploration fueled the imperial struggles of the early sixteenth century and the so-called Religious Wars of 1559–1648. The growing cost of warfare stretched the resources of princes to the breaking point. This led to massive unrest as subjects sought to recover rights and privileges lost to rulers who were desperate to pay for security. Both the subsequent revolts and the international conflict that helped to sustain them were complicated by religious issues that made them extremely difficult to resolve. In the end, the wars of what has been called the Iron Age brought much of Europe to the brink of political and economic disintegration.



The Portuguese Voyages to Africa, India, and Brazil

The process of overseas exploration began appropriately enough in Portugal, the first modern monarchy and the center of the fourteenth-century revolution in shipbuilding. The Portuguese state had been effectively consolidated by John I in 1385. Like other medieval rulers, he and his descendants hoped to maximize domain revenue by increasing taxable commerce. The gold and ivory of Africa were a tempting goal, but that



Illustration 15.1

▧ A Portuguese Caravel of the Fifteenth Century. Though rarely more than seventy or eighty feet in length, these vessels were extremely seaworthy and formed the mainstay of Portugal's explorations along the coasts of Africa and in the Atlantic. This one is lateen rigged for better performance to windward, but some of them carried square sails as well, usually on the foremast.

trade was dominated by Moroccan intermediaries who shipped products from the African heartland by camel caravan and sold them to Europeans through such ports as Ceuta and Tangier. The Portuguese knew that enormous profits could be realized by sailing directly to the source of these commodities and bypassing the middlemen, who were in any case Muslims and their traditional enemies.

These considerations, and others of a more spiritual nature, inspired Prince Henry "the Navigator" (1394–1460) to establish a center for navigational development on the windswept bluffs of Sagres at the far southwestern tip of Europe. While Henry's cosmographers and mathematicians worked steadily to improve the quality of charts and navigational techniques, his captains sailed ever further along the African coast, returning with growing quantities of gold, ivory, pepper, and slaves, for the enslavement of Africans was part of the expansionist enterprise from the start. Their ships were fast, handy caravels that combined the best features of northern and Mediterranean construction (see illustration 15.1). Their instruments were improved versions of the compass, the quadrant, and the astrolabe. The compass had been introduced to the Mediterranean in the twelfth or thirteenth century, probably by the

Arabs. The quadrant and the astrolabe permitted the sailor to find his latitude based on the elevation of the sun above the horizon.

Before the death of Prince Henry, the Portuguese adopted the idea of sailing around the tip of Africa to India as their primary goal. By so doing they hoped to bypass the Italian-Arab monopoly and gain direct access to the spice trade. In May 1498, Vasco da Gama reached Calicut on the coast of India after a voyage of two years. His arrival disturbed political and commercial relationships that had endured for centuries. Indian and Arab merchants found the newcomers rude and barbaric and their trade goods of little interest. Though the voyages of da Gama and Cabral made a profit, only the judicious use of force could secure a major Portuguese share in the trade. After 1508 Afonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515) tried to gain control of the Indian Ocean by seizing its major ports. Aden and Ormuz eluded him, but Goa became the chief Portuguese base in India and the capture of Malacca (1511) opened the way to China. A Portuguese settlement was established there at Macao in 1556. Trade with Japan was initiated in 1543, and for seventy-five years thereafter ships from Macao brought luxury goods to Nagasaki in return for silver.

These achievements earned Portugal a modest place in Asian commerce. The Portuguese may have been the first people of any race to trade on a truly worldwide basis, but the total volume of spices exported to Europe did not immediately increase as a result of their activities. Furthermore, the Arab and Gujerati merchants of the Indian Ocean remained formidable competitors for more than a century.



Columbus and the Opening of America

Meanwhile, the Spanish, by sailing west, had reached America. Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon regarded the expansion of their Portuguese rivals with dismay and believed, as Prince Henry had done, that they were obligated by morality and the requirements of dynastic prestige to spread the Catholic faith. When a Genoese mariner named Christopher Columbus proposed to reach Asia by sailing across the Atlantic, they were prepared to listen.

In August 1492, Columbus set sail in the ship *Santa Maria* accompanied by two small caravels, the *Pinta* and the *Niña*. Their combined crews totaled about ninety men. Columbus sailed southwest to the Canary Islands and then westward across the Atlantic, taking

DOCUMENT 15.1

The Hazards of a Long Voyage

This extract is taken from a firsthand account of Fernando Magellan's voyage around the world by Antonio Pigafetta, but similar conditions might be expected on any sea journey if it lasted long enough. The disease described is scurvy, which results from a deficiency of vitamin C. It was a serious problem even on transatlantic voyages. The cause was not understood until the eighteenth century, but captains could usually predict the first date of its appearance in a ship's company with some accuracy.

Wednesday, November 28, we debauched from that strait [since named after Magellan], engulfing ourselves in the Pacific Sea. We were three months and twenty days without getting any kind of fresh food. We ate biscuit, which was no longer biscuit, but powder of biscuits swarming with worms, for they had eaten the good. It stank strongly of the urine of rats. We drank yellow water that had been putrid for many days. We also ate some ox hides that covered the top of the mainyard to prevent the yard from chafing the shrouds, and which had become exceedingly hard because of the sun, rain, and wind. We left them in the sea for four or five days, and then placed them on top of the embers and so ate them; and we often ate sawdust from boards. Rats were sold for one-half ducat a piece, and even then we could not get them. But above all the other misfortunes the following was the worst. The gums of both the lower and upper teeth of some of our men swelled so that they could not eat under any circumstances and therefore died. Nineteen men died from that sickness. . . . Twenty-five or thirty men fell sick.

Pigafetta, Antonio. *Magellan's Voyage Around the World*, ed. and trans. J. A. Robertson. Cleveland: 1902.

advantage of winds and currents that he could not fully have understood. In spite of the season he encountered no hurricanes and, on October 12, sighted what he believed to be an island off the coast of Japan. It was one of the Bahamas.

Columbus made three more voyages before his death in 1506, insisting until the end that he had found the western passage to Asia. The realization that it was a continent whose existence had only been suspected

by Europeans was left to others. One of them, a Florentine navigator named Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512), gave it his name. The true dimensions of the “New World” became clearer in 1513 when Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama on foot and became the first European to look upon the Pacific.

The achievement of Columbus has been somewhat diminished by his own failure to grasp its significance and by the fact that others had no doubt preceded him. The Vikings visited Newfoundland and may have explored the North American coast as far south as Cape Cod. Portuguese and Basque fishermen had almost certainly landed there in the course of their annual expeditions to the Grand Banks, but being fishermen, they kept their discoveries secret and these early contacts came to nothing.

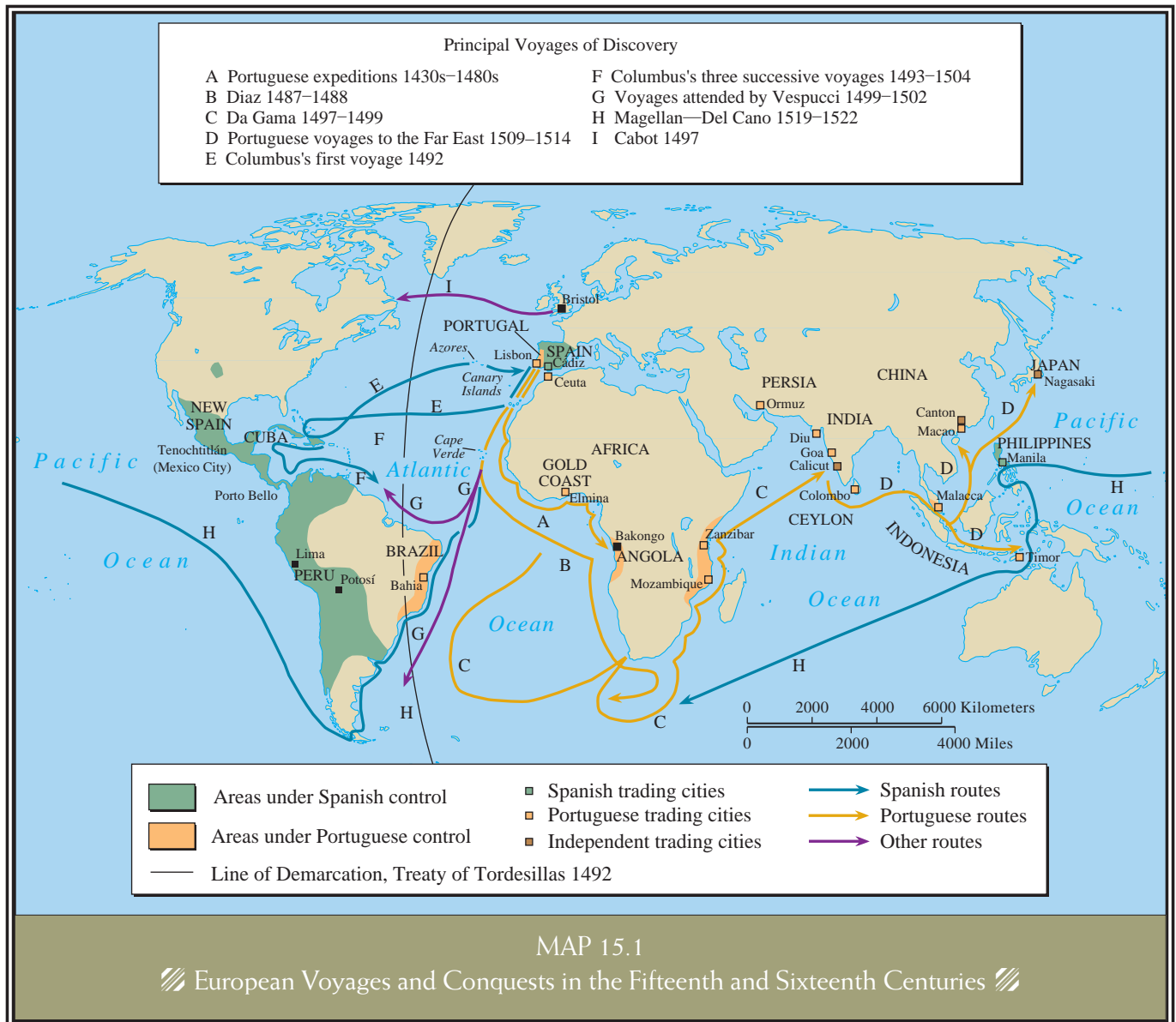
The voyage of Columbus, however, set off a frenzy of exploration and conquest. By the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), the Spanish and Portuguese agreed to a line of demarcation established in mid-Atlantic by the pope. Lands “discovered” to the east of that line belonged to Portugal; those to the west belonged to Spain. The inhabitants of those lands were not consulted. This left Brazil, Africa, and the route to India in Portuguese hands, but a line of demarcation in the Pacific was not defined. Much of Asia remained in dispute.

To establish a Spanish presence there, an expedition was dispatched in 1515 to reach the Moluccas by sailing west around the southern tip of South America. Its leader was Fernando Magellan, a Portuguese sailor in Spanish pay. Magellan crossed the Pacific only to be killed in the Moluccas by natives unimpressed with the benefits of Spanish sovereignty (see document 15.1). His navigator, Sebastian del Cano, became the first captain to circumnavigate the globe when he brought the expedition's only remaining ship back to Spain with fifteen survivors in 1522. The broad outlines of the world were now apparent (see map 15.1).



The First Colonial Empires: Portugal and Spain

Conquest and the imposition of European government accompanied exploration from the beginning. The Portuguese made no effort to impose their direct rule on large native populations, in part because they lacked the manpower to do so and in part because the primary purpose of Portuguese expansion was trade. Instead they established a series of merchant colonies to collect



goods from the African, Indian, or Asian interior for transshipment to Portugal in return for cash or European commodities. These colonies were rarely more than towns protected by a Portuguese garrison and governed by Portuguese law. They were not, for the most part, self-sustaining. To prosper, they had to maintain diplomatic and commercial relations with their neighbors while retaining the option of force, either for self-protection or to obtain a favorable market share in regional trade. Because Portugal's population was small, there was no question of large-scale immigration. Governors from Albuquerque onward sought to maintain colonial populations and to solidify Portuguese control by encouraging intermarriage with native peoples.

Communication between these far-flung stations and the mother country was maintained by the largest ships of the age, the thousand-ton carracks of the *Carreira da Índia*. The voyage around the tip of Africa took months and the mortality among crews was dreadful, but profit to the crown made it all seem worthwhile. To discourage smuggling, everything had to be shipped to and from a central point—the Guinea Mines House at Lagos, near Sagres—where royal officials could inspect the cargoes of spice and silks and assess the one-third share owed to the king. In return, the monarchy provided military and naval protection for the colonies and for the convoys that served them. Colonial governors, though appointed by the crown, enjoyed the freedom

that comes from being far from home. Corruption flourished, but Portuguese rule was rarely harsh.

Where controlling large tracts of land became necessary, as in Brazil, the Portuguese established captaincies that were in fact proprietary colonies. Captains-general would be appointed in return for their promise to settle and develop their grants. The model was the settlement of Madeira. However, Brazil evolved into a society based upon African slavery. Its most valuable resources were dye woods and a climate ideal for growing sugar, a commodity for which Europeans had already begun to develop an insatiable craving.

The first Spanish attempts at colonization resembled the Portuguese experience in Brazil. Columbus had set a bad example by trying to enslave the native population of Hispaniola. Similar unsuccessful efforts were made at Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean. The Indians died of disease and overwork, fled to the mainland, or were killed while trying to resist. African slaves were then imported to work in the mines and sugar-cane fields. Royal efforts eventually were able to bring the situation under control, but in the meantime, the conquest of Mexico and Peru had changed the basic nature of Spanish colonial enterprise. For the first time, Europeans sought to impose their rule on societies as complex and populous as their own.

The various nations of central Mexico were grouped into political units that resembled city-states. Their combined population almost certainly exceeded that of Spain. By the fifteenth century, most of these peoples had become either subjects or tributaries of the warlike Aztecs whose capital, Tenochtitlán, was a vast city built in the midst of a lake where Mexico City now stands. With a force that originally numbered only six hundred men, Hernán Cortés seized control of this great empire in only two years (1519–21). He could not have done it without the assistance of the Aztecs' many native enemies, but his success left Spain with the problem of governing millions whose culture was wholly unlike that of Europeans.

The problem was compounded in Peru a decade later. In 1530 Francisco Pizarro landed at Tumbez on the Pacific coast with 180 men and set about the destruction of the Inca Empire. The Incas were the ruling dynasty of the Quechua people. From their capital at Cuzco they controlled a region nearly two thousand miles in length by means of an elaborate system of roads and military supply depots. More tightly organized than the Mexicans, Quechua society was based on communal landholding and a system of forced labor

that supported both the rulers and a complex religious establishment that did not, unlike that of the Aztecs, demand human sacrifice. Pizarro had the good fortune to arrive in the midst of a dynastic dispute that divided the Indians and virtually paralyzed resistance. By 1533 the Spanish, numbering about six hundred, had seized the capital and a vast golden treasure, but they soon began to fight among themselves. Pizarro was murdered in one of a series of civil wars that ended only in 1548.

The rapid conquest of two great empires forced the Spanish crown to confront basic issues of morality and governance. Tension between conquerors and the crown had begun with Columbus. His enslavement of the Indians and high-handed treatment of his own men led to his replacement as governor of Hispaniola. Balboa was executed for his misbehavior in Darien by officials sent from Spain. To regularize the situation, the *encomienda* system, an institution with deep medieval roots, was introduced after the conquests of Mexico and Peru. Conquistadores were to provide protection and religious instruction for a fixed number of Indians in return for a portion of their labor. The system failed. The conquistadores were for the most part desperadoes, members of a large class of otherwise unemployable military adventurers that had survived the wars of Granada or of Italy. They had braved great dangers to win what they thought of as a New World and had no intention of allowing priests and bureaucrats to deprive them of their rewards.

In the meantime, the Indians of the mainland had begun to die in enormous numbers like those of the islands before them. Though many were killed while trying to defend themselves, most fell victim to European diseases for which they had developed no immunities. Smallpox was probably the worst. Estimates of mortality by the end of the sixteenth century range as high as 90 percent, and though all figures from this period are open to question, the conquest clearly was responsible for the greatest demographic catastrophe in historical times (see table 15.1).

Given the state of medical knowledge, little could be done to control the epidemics, but church and state alike were determined to do something about the conquistadores. The Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566) launched a vigorous propaganda campaign on behalf of the Indians that ended in a series of debates at the University of Salamanca. Las Casas won his point. Between 1542 and 1543, the emperor Charles V (1500–58) issued the so-called New Laws, forbidding Indian slavery and abolishing the *encomienda* system.

TABLE 15.1

Population Decline in Central Mexico

Little agreement exists on the size of Mexico's pre-Columbian population. These figures are more conservative than most but reflect a stunning rate of mortality.

Region	Population in 1530–35	Population in 1568
Basin of Mexico (excluding Mexico City)	589,070–743,337	294,535–297,335
Mexico City	218,546–273,183	109,273
Morelos	460,797–614,396	153,599
Southern Hidalgo	257,442–321,802	128,721
Tlaxcala	140,000–165,000	140,000–165,000
West Puebla		
Above 2000 meters	160,664–200,830	80,332
Below 2000 meters	152,412–190,515	38,103
Total	1,978,931–2,509,063	944,563–972,363

Source: Adapted from William T. Sanders, "The Population of the Central Mexican Symbiotic Region, the Basin of Mexico, and the Teotihuacán Valley in the Sixteenth Century," in *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492*, 2d ed., William M. Denevan (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p. 128.

The edicts for the protection of the Indians met with powerful resistance (see document 15.2), and not until the reign of Philip II from 1556 to 1598 did a system of governance become fully implemented that would last throughout the colonial era. The basis of that system was the establishment of Mexico and Peru as kingdoms to be ruled by viceroys who were the personal representatives of the king. Like the Portuguese, Spain tried to limit access to its colonial trade. Foreigners were excluded, and all goods were to be shipped and received through the Casa de Contratación, a vast government establishment in Sevilla. From the middle of the sixteenth century, French and English adventurers sought to break this monopoly and eventually became a threat to Spanish shipping in both Caribbean and European waters. By this time, massive silver deposits had been discovered at Potosí in what is now Bolivia (1545) and at Zacatecas in Mexico (1548). Bullion shipments from the New World soon accounted for more than 20 percent of the empire's revenues, and a system of convoys or *flotas* was established for their protection.

DOCUMENT 15.2

Proclamation of the New Laws in Peru

In 1544 a new viceroy, Blasco Nuñez Vela, introduced the New Laws to Peru. The popular outrage recounted here by Francisco López de Gómara led to a serious but unsuccessful revolt under the leadership of Gonzalo Pizarro, the conqueror's brother.

Blasco Nuñez entered Trujillo amid great gloom on the part of the Spaniards; he publicly proclaimed the New Laws, regulating Indian tributes, freeing the Indians, and forbidding their use as carriers against their will and without pay. He told them, however, that if they had reason to complain of the ordinances they should take their case to the emperor; and that he would write to the king that he had been badly informed to order those laws.

When the citizens perceived the severity behind his soft words, they began to curse. [Some] said that they were ill-requited for their labor and services if in their declining years they were to have no one to serve them; these showed their teeth, decayed from eating roasted corn in the conquest of Peru; others displayed many wounds, bruises, and great lizard bites; the conquerors complained that after wasting their estates and shedding their blood in gaining Peru for the emperor, he was depriving them of the few vassals he had given them.

The priests and friars also declared that they could not support themselves nor serve their churches if they were deprived of their Indian towns; the one who spoke most shamelessly against the viceroy and even against the king was Fray Pedro Muñoz of the Mercedarian Order, saying . . . that the New Laws smelled of calculation rather than of saintliness, for the king was taking away the slaves that he had sold without returning the money received from them. . . . There was bad blood between this friar and the viceroy because the latter had stabbed the friar one evening in Málaga when the viceroy was *corregidor* there.

López de Gómara, Francisco. "Historia de las Indias," trans. B. Keen. In *Historiadores primitivos de las Indias*, vol. 1, p. 251. In *Latin American Civilization*, vol. 1, pp. 142–143. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.

anatomists had seized the initiative. The new device strengthened their position by allowing for the examination of small structures such as capillaries. Blood corpuscles were described for the first time and bacteria were identified, though a full-fledged germ theory would not be verified until the nineteenth century. These discoveries made sustaining the ancient metaphor of the human body as a microcosm of the universe even more difficult. The body was beginning to look more like a machine within a machine.



The Expansion of the Northern Powers: France, England, and the Netherlands

In the years when Galileo and others were transforming European thought, seafarers from France, England, and the Netherlands continued the work of mapping the globe and exploiting its economic resources. The centralized, closely controlled empires created by the Iberian powers had been resented from the first by northern Europeans who wished to engage in the American trade. French pirates and privateers were active in the Caribbean after the 1530s and sacked Havana in 1556. A colony of French Protestants was massacred by the Spanish near the present site of St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565. However, neither of these failures inhibited French, English, and Dutch captains from trying to enter the Caribbean market. The Englishman John Hawkins (1532–95) tried to break the Spanish-Portuguese monopoly by introducing cargoes of slaves in 1562 and again in 1567 but was caught by the incoming *flota* in 1567 and barely escaped with his life. One of his surviving captains, Francis Drake (c. 1543–96), raided Panama in 1572–73 and attacked Spanish shipping in the Pacific when he circumnavigated the globe in 1577–79.

To many in England these efforts, however inspiring, were no substitute for the establishment of permanent English colonies. Commercial interests and the growing political and religious rivalry with Spain demanded nothing less. The first English settlement in North America was planted on Roanoke Island, North Carolina, in 1585 but disappeared before it could be reinforced. Subsequent efforts at Jamestown (1603) and Plymouth (1620) were more successful. The Spanish claimed sovereignty over North America but lacked the resources to settle it or to protect it against interlopers. The native American population was, by comparison with that of Mexico or Peru, small, scattered, and politically disunited. The obstacles to settlement were there-

fore easy to overcome, and by 1650 the English were established at various locations along the entire Atlantic seaboard from Newfoundland to the Carolinas.

From the standpoint of global politics and immediate gain, these North American colonies were something of a disappointment. They produced no precious metals and offered England few strategic advantages. With the notable exception of tobacco from Virginia and Maryland, they had little of value to export and quickly became self-sufficient in everything but luxury items. In the meantime, the French had established themselves in the St. Lawrence valley and were developing an important trade in furs from the North American interior. English competition in the form of the Hudson's Bay Company did not emerge until 1670.

Expansion in the Caribbean remained a primary goal. An English colony was established on the uninhabited island of Barbados in 1624, and sugar was introduced in 1640. By 1660 its sugar exports made Barbados the most valuable of English colonies while its position to windward of the Spanish Main made it virtually invulnerable to Spanish attacks. Sugar colonies of equal wealth were established by the French on the nearby islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. By this time, Spanish power was in decline. In 1656 an English fleet seized Jamaica. Eight years later the French West India Company took possession of some settlements that had been established years before by French buccaneers in the western part of Hispaniola and laid the foundations of St. Domingue, the rich slave colony that would one day become Haiti.

The French and English, like the Spanish and Portuguese, wanted their colonial systems to be self-contained and closed to outsiders, but in practice, this was as difficult to achieve as it had been for their rivals. Both France and England governed their possessions on the proprietary model, and neither developed anything like the elaborate colonial bureaucracy of Spain. Royal authority tended to be correspondingly weak. Distance, the limitations of sailing ship technology, and the perishability of certain cargoes, notably slaves, encouraged smuggling and made it difficult to suppress. Planters and merchants had nothing to gain from dealing exclusively with their own countrymen when others might offer better prices or more rapid delivery. Cargoes could always be landed secretly in remote coves, but much illegal activity was conducted in the open, for governors were under enormous pressure to look the other way.

Almost from the beginning, the chief beneficiaries of this illegal trade were the Dutch, whose maritime activities increased during their revolt against Spain. The Dutch had some ninety-eight thousand ships registered

by 1598, but ships and skill were not enough. They needed bases from which to conduct their operations. Between 1621 and 1640 the newly formed Dutch West India Company seized Curaçao, St. Eustatius, St. Maarten, and Saba in the Caribbean and established a colony called New Amsterdam on the present site of New York. From 1624 to 1654 the Dutch controlled much of the Brazilian coast, and in 1637 they captured the African fortress and slave-trading station of Elmina from the Portuguese. Brazil and New Amsterdam were expensive ventures. The Dutch, like the Portuguese, lacked the manpower to impose their rule on large geographic areas, and when the English seized New Amsterdam in 1664 the West India Company settled down to a more modest, and in the end more profitable, career as a trading company based on Curaçao and St. Eustatius.

Only in the East did the Dutch manage to establish something like regional hegemony. Dutch traders first appeared in East Indian waters in 1595. Bypassing India, they sailed directly to the Spice Islands (Indonesia), rounding the Cape of Good Hope and running due east in the so-called roaring forties before turning north to Java or Sumatra. The fast but dangerous trip brought them directly to the sources of the Portuguese and Indian spice trade. To improve efficiency and minimize competition, the Dutch traders organized in 1602 into the East India Company.

Under the governor-generalship of Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587–1629), the company's forces destroyed the Javan town of Djakarta and rebuilt it as Batavia, center of Dutch enterprise in the East. Local rulers were forced to restrict their trading activities to rice and other local necessities while European competition was violently discouraged. English traders especially had been active in Asian waters since 1591. They formed their own East India Company on Christmas Day in 1600 but lacked the ships and capital to match the Dutch. Coen expelled most of them from the region by 1620. His successors attacked the Portuguese colonies, seizing Malacca in 1641 and the Indian bases shortly thereafter, but Goa survived a Dutch blockade and remained in Portuguese hands until 1961. The Japanese trade fell into Dutch hands when the Portuguese were expelled in 1637, and for two centuries a Dutch trading station in Nagasaki harbor provided that country's only contact with the West.

By 1650 the Dutch had become the dominant force in Europe's Asian trade. More than one hundred Dutch ships sailed regularly to the East, exchanging German arms, armor, linens, and glass for spices and finished silks. Even the surviving Portuguese colonies were

forced to deal largely through Dutch intermediaries. The major exception was Macao, which continued to export Chinese silks to Spain via Manila. This monopoly was successfully challenged in the eighteenth century by the revived British East India Company and to a lesser degree by the French, but the Dutch remained in control of Indonesia until the outbreak of World War II.



The Golden Age in the Netherlands

Long-distance trade made the Netherlands an island of wealth and culture amidst the turmoil of the early seventeenth century (see illustration 16.4). A century before, the economy of the region had been dominated by Antwerp. Its merchants traded in wool from Spain and England, finished cloth from the towns of Brabant and Flanders, wine from the Iberian Peninsula, and a variety of products exported from Germany to England and Scandinavia. The city's prosperity, however, did not survive the Revolt of the Netherlands. Antwerp is located at the head of navigation on the Scheldt, a broad estuary whose western approaches are controlled by the Zeeland towns of Vlissingen (Flushing) and Middelburg. When the Zeelanders joined the Dutch revolt, they cut off Antwerp from the sea and destroyed its prosperity.

Amsterdam took its place. Set in the marshes where the Amstel River meets the IJ, an inlet of the Zuider Zee, the city was virtually impregnable to attack by sea or land. Already the center of the Baltic trade, it grew enormously after 1585 when southern refugees poured in, bringing their capital with them. When Maurits of Nassau took the lands east of the IJssel from Spain between 1591 and 1597, contact with Germany improved and Amsterdam replaced Antwerp as the conduit through which goods flowed from the German interior to the Atlantic and North Sea. The repeated failure of Spanish and Sicilian harvests in the same years made Amsterdam a dominant force in the Mediterranean trade as well. Dutch merchants had established themselves in the Baltic ports of Riga and Gdansk (Danzig) at an early date. The Amsterdam exchange determined the price of wheat, and vast quantities were shipped southward in Dutch ships, together with timber, Swedish iron, and other northern products.

Shipbuilding, always a major industry in the ports of Holland and Zeeland, expanded with the growth of the carrying trade. Economies of scale, better access to Baltic naval stores, and the presence of a skilled maritime population enabled the Dutch to charge

two successive campaigns, was able to annex much of Beloruss and the Ukraine.

Ivan was not a great field general. His son-in-law claimed rather sourly that "he increased his dominions while sitting at home and sleeping." But Ivan built an effective army and introduced the first usable artillery to eastern Europe. As most of his troops were cavalry, and therefore expensive to maintain, either he or his state secretary introduced the "service land" or *pomest'e* system, which granted land directly to cavalymen instead of paying them in cash. It was an ideal way of supporting troops in a land that was still underpopulated and cash-poor. *Pomest'e* offered other dividends as well. It created an armed class that owed its prosperity directly to the tsar and permitted him to destroy local allegiances through the massive resettlement of populations. The annexation of Novgorod, for example, was followed by the removal of more than seven thousand citizens who were located elsewhere in Russia and replaced by Muscovites, many of whom were members of this service class.

The new service class cavalry were drawn primarily from the middle ranks of society and depended for their economic survival on peasant cultivators who worked their land. To ensure the stability of the labor force, they secured an edict in 1497 that restricted peasant movement. Thereafter, peasants were allowed to change employers only during a brief period centered on the feast of St. George (April 23). It was the first step toward serfdom. True serfdom on the Hungarian or Polish model did not become general until the end of the sixteenth century.

The Russia of Ivan III had little in common with western states or with its immediate neighbors. The tsar was an autocrat who ruled with little regard for representative institutions. The Orthodox church was implacably hostile to Latin Christendom. The *pomest'e* system, like many other Russian institutions, derived from Turkish, Persian, and Byzantine precedents, and even daily life had an oriental flavor. Men wore beards and skirtlike garments that touched the ground while women were secluded and often veiled.

In the reign of Ivan's grandson, Ivan IV "the Terrible" (1530–84), the Russian state expanded eastward, adding Kazan and Astrakhan to its dominions. An effort to annex the areas now known as Latvia and Estonia was unsuccessful. Ivan attributed this failure to dissatisfaction among the *boyars*, or great nobles, and pretended to abdicate, returning only on the condition that he be allowed to establish an *oprichnina*. A bizarre

state within a state, the *oprichnina* was regarded as the tsar's private property. Land and even certain streets in Moscow were assigned to it, and the original owners were settled elsewhere. The purpose was to dismantle *boyar* estates as well as to provide income for Ivan's court and for a praetorian guard of six thousand men. Dressed in black and mounted upon black horses, these *oprichniki* carried a broom and the severed head of a dog as symbols of their primary mission: to root out "treason" and terrorize the enemies of the tsar. They succeeded admirably. Though disbanded in 1572, the *oprichniki* represented an institutionalization of autocracy and state terror that was unique in Europe.

Russia's size and military strength made it a great power, but its autocratic system of government ensured that political effectiveness would inevitably depend upon the personal qualities of the tsar. After Ivan IV, ability was conspicuously lacking. Russia turned inward for more than a hundred years, to emerge once again under the not-too-gentle guidance of Peter the Great at the beginning of the eighteenth century.



The New Learning: Learned Culture in the Late Medieval Italian City-State

The social and political transformations of the late Middle Ages were accompanied, as great changes often are, by the development of new intellectual interests. The most important of these was the Renaissance, or, as it was sometimes called, the New Learning. The word *renaissance* means rebirth in French. It is often applied to the entire age that marked the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times, but its original meaning was more restricted. Beginning in the fourteenth century, a number of scholars became interested in the Greco-Roman past. They sought to recover the glories of classical literature because the learning of their own day seemed to them stagnant and largely irrelevant to their needs. A later generation saw the "renaissance" of classical antiquity that they created as the birth of modern times; more recent scholarship has emphasized its continuity with the medieval past. In its original form, the Renaissance was a direct outgrowth of life in the medieval Italian city-state, and its first proponents were Italian.

The status of medieval town dwellers was unclear. Even the richest were, by feudal standards, of humble origin, yet their wealth and literacy set them apart from

the peasants. Chivalric literature affected to despise them, and ecclesiastical theorists found their activities dubious if not wicked. Trade, the lifeblood of any city, was often regarded as parasitic. The merchant bought low and sold high, profiting from the honest toil of the peasant and raising prices for everyone. The need for mechanisms of distribution was not always fully understood. Worse yet, the townsman was frequently a citizen (women, though they engaged in trade, had neither civic rights nor obligations). Under law he was compelled to vote and to hold public office if elected. Even before St. Augustine, western Christianity had been deeply suspicious of public life, regarding it as incompatible with concern for one's soul. In short, two of the most significant features of town life were either ignored by medieval writers or condemned by them outright.

A certain alienation from the norms of medieval culture was therefore to be expected among townsfolk even if it was not always fully conscious or easily articulated. This alienation was most intense in Italy. Italian town life had developed early. The acquisition of full sovereignty, rare in other parts of Europe, gave a peculiar intensity to political life in the Italian city-states while imposing heavy moral and intellectual responsibilities on their citizens. Extensive contact with the Muslim and Byzantine worlds may also have left the Italians more open to influences that came from outside the orbit of chivalric or scholastic ideas.

By the end of the thirteenth century, the intellectual life of the Italian towns was beginning to acquire a distinct flavor of its own. This was evident to some extent in the works of Dante Alighieri (1265–1321). His masterwork, *The Divine Comedy*, a brilliant evocation of hell, purgatory, and paradise written in the Tuscan vernacular (the basis of modern Italian), is arguably the greatest poem ever written by a European. It is filled with classical allusions and references to Florentine politics but remains essentially medieval in inspiration. The widening gap between Italian culture and that of the scholastic, chivalric north is far more striking in the city chronicles that were becoming popular with the urban elite. Unlike northern chronicles, which were often little more than a simple record of events, they increasingly sought to analyze the causes of political and economic phenomena to provide guidance for policy makers. On a less practical level, the *Decameron*, by the Florentine Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75), was a collection of stories that portrayed the lives of city people with little reference to the conventions of chivalry.

That Boccaccio and another Florentine, Francesco Petrarca (or Petrarch, 1304–74), were among the first to develop a serious interest in the Roman past is no accident. Petrarch grew up in exile and spent most of his life at the papal court in Avignon, an existence that no doubt sharpened his personal sense of distance from chivalric and scholastic values. Believing, like other Italians, that he was descended from the ancient Romans, he began to seek out classical manuscripts and to compose works in Latin that demonstrated his affinity with the antique past. Among them were letters addressed to such ancient figures as Cicero and Livy and an epic poem, *Africa*, inspired by his reading of Virgil's *Aeneid*. His friend Boccaccio followed his lead in collecting manuscripts and compiled an encyclopedia of Greco-Roman mythology.

Petrarch is probably best known today for his sonnets written in the Tuscan vernacular, but classical studies consumed most of his working life. His efforts made an undeniably vital point. To Petrarch and to many of his readers, the society of ancient Rome had more in common with that of the Italian states than did the chivalric, scholastic world of transalpine Europe. The ancients had lived in cities and had believed that good citizenship was the highest of virtues. Accordingly, they had produced a vast body of literature on rhetoric, politics, history, and the other arts needed to produce effective citizens. Many Italians would eventually find these works to be of great practical value in the conduct of their lives.

Those who did so, and who made the study of antiquity their primary task, became known as humanists. The term was coined by Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370–1444) to describe those engaged in *studia humanitatis*, the study of secular letters as opposed to theology or divine letters. The movement became popular in Florence during the political crisis of 1392–1402 when Bruni and other publicists used classical examples of civic virtue to stir up the public against Giangaleazzo Visconti, despot of Milan, and his expansionist schemes. Even more important was the enthusiasm aroused by the arrival in Italy of Greek scholars who were seeking western aid against the Turks. Petrarch had known that Roman culture had Greek roots but could find no one to teach him classical Greek. Manuel Chrysoloras, Cardinal Bessarion, and other members of the Greek delegation were able to do this for Bruni's generation and, by so doing, opened up a great literary tradition that had been lost to the west for centuries. Spurred by these developments, humanism spread from Florence and

Rome to Venice and the other Italian states. By the mid-fifteenth century, it was attracting followers beyond the Alps.

Humanism: Its Methods and Its Goals

Associating the early humanists with any fixed ideological or philosophical system is difficult. Most of them were either teachers of rhetoric or the editors of classical texts whose chief purpose was to study the classics and to apply ancient ideas and values to life in their own time. As such they might be found on almost any side of a given issue. But for all their variety, they shared certain presuppositions that defined them as a movement. Humanists by definition believed in the superiority of ancient culture. Errors, they said, were modern. Where medieval writers had seen their world as a historical extension of antiquity, the humanists saw a radical disjuncture between ancient and modern times, and they regarded the interval between the fall of Rome and their revival of antique ideals as a "middle age" of barbarity, ignorance, and above all, bad style. Immersed in the elegance of classical Latin, they were deeply concerned with form, sometimes, according to their critics, at the expense of substance.

Because they revered the classical past, they shared a preference for argument based on the authority of ancient sources and a suspicion of formal reason that bordered on contempt. The scholastics in particular were thought to be sterile and misguided, in part because of their bad Latin, but also because the nominalist rejection of reason as a support for faith had led the philosophers into pursuits that humanists regarded as trivial. Scholastics sometimes counterattacked by accusing them of irreligion. Though humanists were to be found among the critics of the church, few if any rejected conventional religious belief. The Renaissance moved Western society strongly toward secularism by reviving the ancient preoccupation with human beings and their social relationships. Writers such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola asserted "the dignity of man" against preachers who saw humanity as wholly depraved (see document 13.3), but even Pico believed that human dignity derived largely from man's central place in a divinely established universe. Unbelief was not at issue. The humanists believed in perfecting their minds and bodies on Earth while preparing their souls for the hereafter.

Such a goal was fundamentally educational, and the humanists were predictably concerned with educational theory. Their purpose was to create *il uomo universale*, the

DOCUMENT 13.3

Pico: The Dignity of Man

Giovanni Pico, count of Mirandola (1463–94) was something of a prodigy who, before his death at thirty-one, wrote extensively on many subjects. Like many humanists he was deeply interested in magic, the occult, and Neoplatonic philosophy. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* he produced what some regard as the classic Renaissance statement of human dignity and freedom. The argument is based largely on humanity's place in the Great Chain of Being, the hierarchical structure of the universe described by such Neoplatonic writers as Dionysius the Areopagite, but Pico's *Oration* provides a vision of human potential rarely emphasized in medieval writing.

[God] took man as a creature of indeterminate nature and, assigning him a place in the middle of the world, addressed him thus: "Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have We given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws proscribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thy own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world's center that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and honor . . . thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.

Pico, Giovanni. "Oration on the Dignity of Man." In E. Cassirer, P.O. Kristeller, and J.H. Randall, Jr., eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948.

universal man whose person combined intellectual and physical excellence and who was capable of functioning honorably in virtually any situation. It was the ancient Greco-Roman ideal, brought up-to-date and applied to life in the Italian city-state where the small size of the community forced citizens or courtiers to play many roles. Though most fully described in *The Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione (published in 1528), it had long been present in the thinking of such educational theorists as Vittorino da Feltre (1386–1446) and Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72).

The heart of Renaissance education was ancient literature and history (see document 13.4). The classics were thought to provide both moral instruction and the deep understanding of human behavior without which correct action in the present is impossible. They were also a guide to style. The ability to communicate is essential to political life, and good writing comes largely from immersion in good literature. Humanists taught the art of persuasion through an exhaustive study of rhetoric based on the writings of Quintilian and Cicero.

Because citizens and courtiers would almost certainly participate in war, study was thought to be necessary in military history and theory, the art of fortification, and ballistics. Educators regarded proficiency with weapons and physical fitness as essential for war, furthermore, like the ancients, they regarded athletic skill as of value in its own right. The Renaissance man or woman was also expected to be good company. Sports were a social skill as was dancing, the ability to play musical instruments, and the possession of a trained singing voice. Art was useful, not merely for the sake of appreciation, but also as a tool of observation. Before the camera, only drawing or sketching could preserve a record of visual impressions—or accurately portray the fortifications of one's enemies. Other useful subjects included mathematics, accounting, medicine, and the natural sciences.

The preferred means of imparting this rather daunting quantity of knowledge was in small academies or by means of a tutor. The teacher was supposed to live with his students and be a moral example and friend as well as a purveyor of knowledge. Students were not to be beaten or threatened but induced to learn by arousing their interest in the subject at hand. These humanist theories, and the classical examples from which they came, remain the basis of today's liberal arts education. They have had an enormous impact on the formation of European youth and on the devel-

DOCUMENT 13.4

The Value of the Liberal Arts

Peter Paul Vergerio (1370–1444) was a leading Renaissance educational theorist. The following is from a letter he wrote to another humanist, Ubertino of Carrara.

For no wealth, no possible security against the future, can be compared with the gift of education in grave and liberal studies. By them a man may win distinction for the most modest name, and bring honor to the city of his birth however obscure it may be. . . .

We come now to the consideration of the various subjects which may rightly be included under the name of "Liberal Studies." Among these I accord the first place to History, on grounds both of its attractiveness and its utility, qualities which appeal equally to the scholar and to the statesman. Next in importance is Moral Philosophy, which indeed is, in a peculiar sense, a "Liberal Art" in that its purpose is to teach men the secret of true freedom. History, then, gives us the concrete examples of the precepts inculcated by philosophy. The one shows what men should do, the other what men have said and done in the past, and what lessons we may draw therefrom for the present day. I would indicate as the third main branch of study, Eloquence, which indeed holds a place of distinction among the refined Arts. By philosophy we learn the essential truth of things, which by eloquence we so exhibit in orderly adornment as to bring conviction to differing minds. And history provides the light of experience.

Vergirio, Peter Paul. Letter to Ubertino of Carrara. In W.H. Woodward, ed., *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators*, pp. 106–107. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963.

opment of Western culture. However, humanist education was intended only for a relatively narrow social elite: the select group that participated in public life and exercised some degree of control over its own destiny. Even women were largely excluded, though humanists such as Leonardo Bruni, Juan Luis Vives, and Thomas More argued that women should be educated in much the same way as men (see document 13.5).

◆ DOCUMENT 13.5 ◆

Louise Labé: The Education of Women

Though the Renaissance ideal of education extended only to a minority of women, many saw even this as a liberating step forward in the development of women as a whole. One of them was Louise Labé (c. 1524–66), an important French poet whose ideas in some ways foreshadow modern feminism. The following is from a dedicatory preface written to a friend.

Since a time has come, Mademoiselle, when the severe laws of men no longer prevent women from applying themselves to the sciences and other disciplines, it seems to me that those of us who can should use this long-craved freedom to study and to let men see how greatly they wronged us when depriving us of its honor and advantages. And if any woman becomes so proficient as to be able to write down her thoughts, let her do so and not despise the honor but rather flaunt it instead of fine clothes, necklaces, and rings. For these may be considered ours only by use, whereas the honor of being educated is ours entirely. . . . If the heavens had endowed me with sufficient wit to understand all I would have liked, I would serve in this as an example rather than an admonishment.

But having devoted part of my youth to musical exercises, and finding the time left too short for the crudeness of my understanding, I am unable in my own case, to achieve what I want for our sex, which is to see it outstrip men not only in beauty but in learning and virtue. All I can do is to beg our virtuous ladies to raise their minds somewhat above their distaffs and spindles and try to prove to the world that if we were not made to command, still we should not be disdained in domestic and public matters by those who govern and command obedience.

If there is anything to be recommended after honor and glory, anything to incite us to study, it is the pleasure which study affords. Study differs in this from all other recreations, of which all one can say, after enjoying them, is that one has passed the time. But study gives a more enduring sense of satisfaction. For the past delights us and serves more than the present.

Labé, Louise. Dedicatory preface. From J. Aynard, ed., *Les poètes lyonnais précurseurs de la Pléiade*. In Julia O’Faolain and Lauro Martines, *Not in God’s Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians*, pp. 184–185. London: Temple Smith, 1973.

Such women as Vitoria Colonna and More’s daughter, Margaret Roper, developed a reputation for classical learning. But for the most part, the education of upper-class women continued to emphasize the domestic and social graces as it had done for centuries.

The usefulness of the Renaissance educational ideal was in part responsible for the spread of humanism beyond the Alps. The requirements of life as a courtier or servant of the crown in England, France, or Spain were not unlike those demanded of the upper-class Italian. Such people were among the first non-Italians to develop an interest in the classics, but they were quickly followed by their princes. Isabella of Castile, for example, imported Italian humanists to raise the educational standards of her court and administration. Lawyers, too, were intrigued by humanist methods. The development of philology and of the historical analysis of texts had been among the first achievements of humanist scholarship. The legal profession in France and Germany was soon divided between those who added the new tech-

niques to their arsenals and those who refused to do so. Above all, town councils were quick to recognize the usefulness of officials trained in the new learning. It became desirable, especially in the cities of the Holy Roman Empire, to have town clerks who could communicate with one another in classical Latin and who possessed the training to interpret and decipher old documents. Usefulness aside, the presence of learned humanists within a town or principality had become a matter of prestige.

The universities were in general more resistant to change. They remained the strongholds of Aristotelianism if for no other reason than that their traditional role had been the training of theologians. Some, however, such as John Colet at Oxford and Lefèvre d’Etaples at Paris, began to perceive the usefulness of humanism for the study of religious literature, which was another form of ancient text. Others, outside the universities, shared their concern. The most famous of those who turned humanist methods to the study of Scripture and



Illustration 13.2

Erasmus of Rotterdam. In this famous portrait by Hans Holbein, the greatest of the northern humanists is shown at his writing desk.

of the Fathers of the church was Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469–1536). Believing that corrupted texts had led to false interpretations, he devoted much of his extraordinarily busy and productive life to providing authoritative editions of religious texts. Best known today for his satirical attacks on ecclesiastical ignorance and for his bitter controversy with Martin Luther over the issue of free will, he was in many ways the epitome of the humanist whose chief interests were religious (see illustration 13.2). His English friend Sir Thomas More (1477–1535) combined religious with secular interests. A lawyer who ultimately became lord chancellor to Henry VIII, he is perhaps best known for *Utopia*, his vision of a perfect society that recalls Plato's *Republic*. More also applied humanist scholarship to the law and to religious questions before being martyred for his opposition to the Reformation. He was sainted by the Catholic Church in 1935. The value of humanist studies was recognized on occasion by even the most conservative of churchmen. Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de

Cisneros, archbishop of Toledo, grand inquisitor, and ultimately regent of Castile, established the University of Alcalá de Henares in 1508 to provide humanist training for the Spanish clergy. Among its first products was the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, printed in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin.

The Impact of Renaissance Humanism on the Arts and Sciences

By 1500 humanist methods and values had spread to virtually every part of Europe. Their impact on the arts and sciences was enormous, though not always what one might expect. The humanists developed classical studies as they are known today. They created the first standardized editions of classical works and distributed them widely after printing with moveable type was invented, probably by Johan Gutenberg, in the mid-fifteenth century. In the process, humanism gave birth to the disciplines of linguistics, philology (the study of words), and historical criticism.

In literature, however, humanist devotion to the classics retarded the development of vernacular writing for more than a century. Those with literary inclinations preferred to write in Latin, often in slavish imitation of the elaborate Roman style that had developed during the Augustan Age. When vernacular literature was revived in the sixteenth century by such figures as Tasso and Ariosto in Italy, Cervantes and Garcilaso de la Vega in Spain, Rabelais and Montaigne in France, and Marlowe and Shakespeare in England, it was transformed by classical themes and rules of composition. The fifteenth century, however, had been remarkably unproductive. Latin, in the meantime, was practically destroyed as a living language. Because the humanists insisted on weeding out all nonclassical usages, the language ceased to evolve as it had done throughout the Middle Ages when it was the day-to-day language of diplomacy and administration in both church and state. Ironically, by the middle of the sixteenth century, Latin had largely been supplanted by the various European vernaculars in every western government outside the papal states.

The contribution of humanism to the study of history and politics was far more positive. From the beginning, humanists had regarded history as essential to a political education. At the very least, it provided inspiring examples of civic virtue and cautionary tales that would help the citizen or courtier to avoid the mistakes of the past.

In the Middle Ages, the dominant form of history had been the chronicle. Outside the Italian cities, chroniclers tended to record events without troubling themselves greatly over causation or the objective accuracy of their sources. The cause of historical events was after all God's will. The Greeks and Romans had taken a different view. Beginning with Thucydides, the best of them had defined their topics as questions to be answered in causal terms because they believed that human nature was consistent and that history therefore repeated itself. If history was cyclical, it offered a price-less guide to action in the present, not so much because it was predictive in absolute terms, but because the process of historical causation could be understood and used by the educated to their own advantage.

The most effective exponent of this view during the Renaissance was the Florentine lawyer and sometime politician Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). In works such as *The Prince* and *The Discourses on Livy* he attempted to establish rules for the conduct of political life based upon examples from the historical past. In the process, he freed political theory from the theological principles upon which it had long been based. While his name became a byword for cynicism and political manipulation, Machiavelli was in his own way an idealist. The Italian wars begun by Charles VIII of France in 1495 eventually destroyed the independence of the Italian cities with only Venice retaining full sovereignty. Machiavelli believed that this calamity could be understood and remedied only by looking with a clear eye at the way in which politics was conducted (see document 13.6).

His younger contemporary, Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540), agreed but thought that governing oneself by the kind of rules proposed by Machiavelli was impossible. As he said in his *Ricordi*, a grim collection of musings on a variety of subjects, no two situations were the same; there were always exceptions. He seems to have believed that by studying history one absorbed what he called discretion: the ability to react intelligently to unforeseen contingencies. His *History of Italy*, which examines the loss of Italian freedom in the years after 1494, is probably the first modern historical work and remains a useful source for the political and military history of the age.

By comparison with its impact on politics and history, the humanist contribution to philosophy was indirect. The Renaissance was not a great age of formal speculation, but the course of modern philosophy would be hard to imagine without the recovery of classical works that had been lost during the Middle Ages.

DOCUMENT 13.6

The Political Philosophy of Machiavelli

Niccolò Machiavelli's most famous book was *The Prince* in which he appears to favor despotic rule as a means of ridding Italy of its "barbarian" invaders. However, he was an ardent republican both in theory and in his own career as secretary to the second chancery of the Florentine republic. The following passage from *The Discourses* sets out what may be taken as his real view.

And finally to sum up this matter, I say that both governments of princes and of the people have lasted a long time, but both require to be regulated by laws. For a prince who knows no other control but his own will is like a madman, and a people that can do as it pleases will hardly be wise. If now we compare a prince who is controlled by laws, and a people who is untrammelled by them, we shall find more virtue in the people than in the prince; and if we compare them when both are freed from such control, we shall see that the people are guilty of fewer excesses than the prince, and that the errors of the people are of less importance, and may therefore be more easily remedied. For a licentious and mutinous people can be brought back to good conduct by the influence and persuasion of a good man, but an evil-minded prince is not amenable to such influences, and there is therefore no other remedy against him but cold steel.

Macchiavelli, Nicolò, *The Discourses* I, 58, trans. Luigi Ricci, rev. E.R.P. Vincent. Modern Library Editions. New York: Random House, 1950.

Much of Aristotle, most of Plato and the Alexandrian Neoplatonists, the Pre-Socratics, and many of the Epicureans and Stoics were either unknown or had been studied with little regard to their historical and intellectual context. By recovering lost works and seeking a deeper understanding of the mental world that had produced them, the humanists immeasurably broadened philosophic discourse in the West. By attacking the scholastics, they opened the way for the acceptance of ideas that lay outside the Aristotelian tradition as it was then understood. They may have done little to exploit

their own discoveries, but they made possible the great philosophical achievements of the seventeenth century. The impact of humanism on science was similar. Few humanists were scientists in the modern sense of the word. Many were devotees of what would now be called superstition, though the term is unhistorical. Believing that the wisdom of the ancients was superior, and aware that Greeks and Romans had believed in divination, sorcery, astrology, and natural magic, some humanists deliberately encouraged a revival of these practices. Notions that would have been regarded as absurd in the days of Aquinas were taken seriously. Nevertheless, in their zeal to recover every aspect of the ancient past, they found and edited works that would eventually revolutionize Western thought. Galen in medicine, Eratosthenes and Aristarchus of Samos in cosmology, Archimedes in physics, and a host of other writers were rediscovered, edited, and popularized.

The humanists also transmitted the idea, derived ultimately from Pythagoras, that the universe was based on number. This is the basic principle of numerology, now regarded as a pseudoscience, but it inspired such figures as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) to explore the mathematization of physics. Leonardo is best known today as an artist and inventor whose ideas were far in advance of their time. Though Leonardo failed in his effort regarding physics, Galileo and others would eventually learn to express physical relationships in mathematical formulae, an important step in the development of modern science (see chapter 16).

Few of these achievements had an immediate impact on the life of ordinary Europeans. The recovery of classical antiquity was an intellectual movement created by and for a self-conscious elite, and many years would pass before it touched the consciousness of the general public. In one area, however, classical values intruded on material life, redefining the public spaces in which people moved and altering their visual perceptions of the world. Renaissance art, architecture, and city planning brought the aesthetic values of Greece and Rome down to street level. They eventually spread from the Italian towns to the farthest reaches of Europe and America.

Italian artists had turned to classical ruins for inspiration as early as the thirteenth century. With the emergence of humanism, ancient models became universal. The architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) measured ancient ruins to determine their proportions. He then sketched their pediments, columns, and ornamentation with the intention of adapting Roman forms to



Illustration 13.3

Leon Battista Alberti's Tempio Malatesta. The unfinished church of San Francesco at Rimini was built about 1450. Rimini was a city in the papal states whose ruler, the infamous Sigismundo Malatesta, was a great admirer of all things Roman. At his request, Alberti transformed an existing church into a Roman temple whose facade resembles a triumphal arch. Sigismundo commissioned a statue of the Virgin Mary whose features were modeled on those of his mistress, Isotta degli Atti.

the purposes of his own day. Within a generation, churches were being built that resembled pagan temples (see illustration 13.3). New construction, private and public, sported columns, pilasters, and window treatments borrowed from the porticoes of Roman buildings. It was not mere antiquarianism because Brunelleschi and his successors—Alberti, Bramante, and the sixteenth-century master Palladio—knew that modern structures were different in function from those of the past. So successful were their adaptations that Roman forms and ornamentation remained a standard feature of Western architecture until the twentieth century.

The revival of classical taste in painting and sculpture was equally important. Medieval artists had illustrated classical themes, and some of them, such as Nicola Pisano (c. 1220–c. 1278), had successfully imitated classical forms, though only in portraying scenes from the Bible (see illustration 13.4). In medieval practice, tales from ancient history or mythology were normally portrayed in contemporary settings because they were intended as moral or religious allegories whose



Illustration 13.4

/// **The Anunciation**, by Nicola Pisano. This panel from the Baptistery at Pisa was completed in 1260. It demonstrates that classical models had come to influence Italian art long before the Renaissance took root as a literary movement.

message was often unlike that of their pagan originals. To the humanists, with their archaeological view of history, this was absurd. Classical forms were appropriate to classical subjects as well as to those derived from the Bible. The imitation of classical models and the use of classical settings therefore became almost universal. Ancient ideas of beauty and proportion were adopted, especially for the portrayal of the human body.

But Renaissance art was not an exercise in antiquarianism. The technique of painting with oils, developed in the Low Countries during the fifteenth century, was soon in general use. The effort to portray the world in three dimensions, begun with the use of *chiaroscuro* or shading by Giotto (c. 1266–c. 1337), was brought to a triumphal conclusion with Brunelleschi's discovery of the mathematical laws of perspective. Their application in the paintings of Andrea Mantegna (c. 1431–1506) inspired other artists, and the viewing public soon came to accept foreshortening and perspective as the norm (see illustration 13.5).

These techniques were new. Furthermore, Renaissance artists differed from the ancients in other ways. They were not pagans, and though they admired antiquity, they retained many of the ideas and symbols of the medieval past. Their art combined classical and Christian sensibilities in a new synthesis that shaped European aesthetic values until their vision was challenged by the rise of photography and nonrepresenta-



Illustration 13.5

/// **St. James Led to Execution**, by Andrea Mantegna. Mantegna was one of the first Renaissance painters to use the laws of perspective discovered by the architect Filippo Brunelleschi. In this fresco from the Ovetari Chapel, Church of the Eremitani, Padua, painted c. 1454–57, the vanishing point is below the bottom of the picture. Note also the classicism of the triumphal arch.

tional art in the nineteenth century. Eventually, artists such as Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) would transcend the rules of classical composition, distorting the proportions of the human body to express dramatic spiritual and emotional truths (see illustration 13.6). But even he and his Baroque followers in the seventeenth century remained well within the bounds of classical inspiration.

A century ago, most historians believed that the Renaissance marked the beginning of the modern world. As the full implications of the industrial revolution became clear, that conviction has dimmed and the distance between twentieth-century Westerners and the preoccupations of the humanists has widened. Few today believe that the Renaissance was a true rebirth of classical antiquity or as revolutionary as its more enthusiastic supporters claimed. There had been a Carolingian Renaissance and a Renaissance of the Twelfth



Illustration 13.6

/// Tombs of Giuliano de' Medici, Duke of Nemours and Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, by Michelangelo.

Michelangelo executed this magnificent group in the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo, Florence, between 1520 and 1534. The distorted poses of the heavily muscled reclining figures as well as the dramatic arrangement of the entire piece point away from classical balance and serenity while retaining a basically antique frame of reference.

Century. Medieval scholars knew and quoted classical writers, but the Renaissance that began in Florence in the generation of the Black Death was far more than just another in a series of European infatuations with the antique past. By rediscovering the lost masterpieces of Greek and Roman literature, by reviving the ancient preoccupation with history, and by reexamining scientific theories ignored during the Middle Ages, the humanists redefined learning and transformed education. By the early fifteenth century, the new learning had become the dominant movement in European intellectual life. Directly or indirectly, it remade each of the arts and sciences in its own image and changed forever the way in which Westerners looked at their world.



Martin Luther and the Outbreak of the Protestant Reformation


The first and in many ways the most influential of these movements was the one created in Germany by Martin Luther (1483–1546). A monk of the Augustinian Observant order and professor of the New Testament at the University of Wittenberg in electoral Saxony, Luther experienced a profound spiritual crisis that eventually brought him into open conflict with the church (see illustration 14.2). Like many of his contemporaries, Luther was troubled by an overwhelming sense of sin and unworthiness for which the teachings of the church provided no relief. Neither the rigors of monastic life nor the sacrament of penance could provide him with assurance of salvation. In the course of his biblical studies, he gradually arrived at a solution. Based on his reading of Paul's Epistle to the Romans and on his growing admiration for the works of St. Augustine, he concluded that souls were not saved by religious ceremonies and good works but by faith alone. Human beings could never be righteous enough to merit God's forgiveness, but they could be saved if only they would believe and have faith in the righteousness of Christ.

Luther felt himself transformed by this insight. Even as he formulated it, he was confronted by the issue of indulgences. In 1517 a special indulgence was made available in the territories surrounding electoral Saxony. Its purpose was to raise money for the construction of St. Peter's basilica in Rome and to retire the debt incurred by Albrecht of Mainz in securing for himself through bribery the archbishoprics of Mainz and Magdeburg and the bishopric of Halberstadt. Albrecht had committed not only pluralism but also simony (the illegal purchase of church offices). To Luther, however, this was not the central issue. To him, as to many other clerics, the sale of indulgences was a symbol of the contractualism that beset medieval piety and blinded lay people to the true path of salvation. On October 31, 1517, he posted ninety-five theses condemning this practice to the door of Wittenberg's Castle Church.

His action was in no way unusual. It was the traditional means by which a professor offered to debate all comers on a particular issue, and the positions taken by Luther were not heretical. Furthermore, the sale of indulgences was later condemned by the Council of Trent. However, Luther's action unleashed a storm of controversy. Spread throughout Germany by the printing press, the theses were endorsed by advocates of reform and condemned by the pope, the Dominican



Illustration 14.2

 **Martin Luther.** This portrait of Luther as a young monk was painted by Lucas Cranach the Elder about a year before the Diet of Worms and shows the reformer as he must have looked when he confronted the Imperial Diet.

order, the archbishop of Mainz, and the Fugger bank of Augsburg, which had loaned Albrecht the money for the elections.

In the debates that followed, Luther was forced to work out the broader implications of his teachings. At Leipzig in June 1519, he challenged the doctrinal authority of popes and councils and declared that Scripture took precedence over all other sources of religious truth. In 1520 he published three pamphlets that drew him at last into formal heresy. In his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, he encouraged the princes to demand reform (see document 14.3). On the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* abolished five of the seven sacraments and declared that the efficacy of baptism and communion were dependent on the faith of the recipient, not the ordination of the priest. He also

◆ DOCUMENT 14.3 ◆

Luther: Address to the German Nobility

Martin Luther's primary concerns were always spiritual and theological, but he knew how to appeal to other emotions as well. These extracts from his Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation are a relatively modest example of the rhetoric with which he attacked the authority of the Catholic Church.

What is the use in Christendom of those who are called "cardinals"? I will tell you. In Italy and Germany there are many rich convents, endowments, holdings, and benefices; and as the best way of getting these into the hands of Rome they created cardinals, and gave to them the bishoprics, convents, and prelacies, and thus destroyed the service of God. That is why Italy is almost a desert now. . . . Why? Because the cardinals must have the wealth. The Turk himself could not have so desolated Italy and so overthrown the worship of God.

Now that Italy is sucked dry, they come to Germany. They begin in a quiet way, but we shall soon have Ger-

many brought into the same state as Italy. We have a few cardinals already. What the Romanists really mean to do, the "drunken" Germans are not to see until they have lost everything . . .

Now this devilish state of things is not only open robbery and deceit and the prevailing of the gates of hell, but it is destroying the very life and soul of Christianity; therefore we are bound to use all our diligence to ward off this misery and destruction. If we want to fight Turks, let us begin here—we cannot find worse ones. If we rightly hang thieves and robbers, why do we leave the greed of Rome unpunished? for Rome is the greatest thief and robber that has ever appeared on earth, or ever will.

Luther, Martin. "Address to the Nobility of the German Nation," (1520), trans. Wace and Buckheim. In B.J. Kidd, *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation*, No. 35. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1911.



Illustration 14.3

/// **The Lutheran Sacraments.** This altar painting from the Lutheran church at Thorslunde, Denmark, is intended as a graphic lesson in theology. Infant baptism is shown at the left. In the center, two communicants receive the sacrament in both kinds, while the preacher at the right emphasizes the importance of God's word.

rejected transubstantiation while arguing that Christ was nevertheless truly present in the Eucharist (see illustration 14.3). *The Freedom of a Christian* summarized Luther's doctrine of salvation by faith. Luther had not intended to break with the church, but his extraordinary skill as a writer and propagandist ignited anti-clerical and antipapal feeling throughout Germany.

Compromise was now impossible, and he was excommunicated on January 31, 1521.

The affair might have ended with Luther's trial and execution, but political considerations intervened. His own prince, Frederick "the Wise" of Saxony, arranged for him to defend his position before the Imperial Diet at Worms in April. The new emperor Charles V was

unimpressed. He placed Luther under the Imperial Ban, and Frederick was forced to protect his monk by hiding him in the Wartburg Castle for nearly a year. Luther used this enforced period of leisure to translate the New Testament into German.

Frederick's motives and those of the other princes and city magistrates who eventually supported Luther's reformation varied widely. Some were inspired by genuine religious feeling or, like Frederick, by a proprietary responsibility for "their" churches that transcended loyalty to a distant and non-German papacy. Others, especially in the towns, responded to the public enthusiasm generated by Luther's writings. Regardless of personal feelings, everyone understood the practical advantages of breaking with Rome. Revenues could be increased by confiscating church property and by ending ecclesiastical immunity to taxation, while the control of church courts and ecclesiastical patronage were valuable prizes to those engaged in state building.

The emperor objected on both political and religious grounds. Charles V was a devout Catholic. He was also committed to the ideal of imperial unity, which was clearly threatened by anything that increased the power and revenues of the princes. Only twenty-one at the Diet of Worms, he was heir to an enormous accumulation of states including Austria, Spain, the Netherlands, and much of Italy (see chapter 15). In theory, only the Ottoman Empire could stand against him. When he abdicated and retired to a Spanish monastery in 1556, the Reformation was still intact. His power, though great, had not been equal to his responsibilities. Pressed on the Danube and in the Mediterranean by the Turks, forced to fight seven wars with France, and beset simultaneously by Protestant princes, urban revolutionaries, and popes who feared the extension of his influence in Italy, Charles failed utterly in his attempts to impose orthodoxy. The empire remained open to religious turmoil.



Other Forms of Protestantism: The Radicals, Zwingli, and Calvin

Some of that turmoil began while Luther was still hidden in the Wartburg. The reformer had believed that, once the gospel was freely preached, congregations would follow it without the direction of an institutional church. He discovered that not all of the pope's enemies shared his interpretation of the Bible. Movements arose that rejected what he saw as the basic insight of the reformation: salvation by faith alone. To many ordi-

nary men and women, this doctrine weakened the ethical imperatives that lay at the heart of Christianity. They wanted a restoration of the primitive, apostolic church—a "gathered" community of Christians who lived by the letter of Scripture. Luther had not gone far enough. Luther in turn thought that they were *schwärmer*, or enthusiasts who wanted to return to the works righteousness of the medieval church. Faced with what he saw as a fundamental threat to reform, Luther turned to the state. In 1527 a system of visitations was instituted throughout Saxony that for all practical purposes placed temporal control of the church in the hands of the prince. It was to be the model for Lutheran Church discipline throughout Germany and Scandinavia, but it did not at first halt the spread of radicalism.

Because these radical movements were often popular in origin or had coalesced around the teachings of an individual preacher, they varied widely in character. Perhaps the most radical were the Antitrinitarians, who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and argued for a piety based wholly upon good works. Under the leadership of two Italian brothers, Laelio and Fausto Sozzini, they found converts among the Polish nobility but had little influence on western Europe. The most numerous were the Anabaptists, a loosely affiliated group who were the spiritual ancestors of the modern Mennonites and Amish. Their name derives from the practice of adult baptism, which they saw not only as a sacrament, but also as the heart of the redemptive process. Baptism was the deliberate decision to follow Christ and could therefore be made only by a responsible adult acting in complete freedom of will. It signified entrance into a visible church of the saints that must, by definition, be separate from the world around it. Most Anabaptists were therefore pacifists who would accept no civic responsibilities, refusing even to take an oath in court (see document 14.4).

This rejection of civic responsibility was seen as a threat to the political order. Hatred of the Anabaptists was one issue on which Lutherans and Catholics could agree, and in 1529 an imperial edict made belief in adult baptism a capital offense. Hatred became something like panic when an atypically violent group of Anabaptists gained control of the city of Münster and proclaimed it the New Jerusalem, complete with polygamy and communal sharing of property. They were eventually dislodged and their leaders executed, but the episode, though unparalleled elsewhere, convinced political and ecclesiastical leaders that their suspicions had been correct. They executed tens of thousands of Anabaptists throughout Germany and the



Illustration 14.5

 **The Final Session of the Council of Trent, 1563.** Attributed to Titian, this painting shows the conclusion of the great

council whose decrees inspired the Catholic Church until the 1960s.

authority, Paul III decided to convene a general council at Trent in 1542. Sessions were held from 1543 to 1549, in 1551–52, and in 1562–63 (see illustration 14.5). Much disagreement arose over goals and the meetings were often sparsely attended, but the Council of Trent was a conspicuous success.

Theologically, Trent marked the triumph of Thomism. Luther's ideas on justification, the sacraments, and the priesthood of all believers were specifically rejected. The medieval concept of the priestly office and the value of good works was reasserted, and at the organizational level efforts were made to correct most of the abuses that had been attacked by the reformers. These included not only the clerical sins of pluralism, absenteeism, nepotism, and simony, but also such distortions of popular piety as the sale of indulgences and the misuse of images. The strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline was one of the council's greatest achievements.

Knowing that many of the church's problems arose from ignorance, the delegates mandated the use of catechisms in instructing the laity and the establishment of diocesan seminaries for the education of priests. The Council of Trent, in short, marked the beginning of the modern Catholic Church. Its institutional principles and the forms of piety that it established were not substantially modified until Vatican II (1962–65).



The Political, Economic, and Social Consequences of Reform

The impact of the sixteenth-century reformations has been the subject of much scholarly debate. The religious unity of western Christendom was clearly shattered, but this had always been more an ideal than a practical reality. Politically, cities and territorial states were the chief beneficiaries of reform, for Protestantism tended to increase their control over church patronage and revenues. Even Catholic states exhibited more independence because the papacy became more cautious in its claims than it had been in the Middle Ages. Though hardly decisive, reform was therefore an important influence on the development of the modern state.

The economic consequences of the Reformation are far less clear. The idea that Protestantism somehow liberated acquisitive instincts and paved the way for the development of capitalism is highly suspect if for no other reason than that capitalism existed long before the Reformation and that the economic growth of such Protestant states as England and the Netherlands can be explained adequately in other ways. In some areas, notably England, the alienation of church property may have accelerated the capitalization of land that had be-

◆ DOCUMENT 14.6 ◆

A Protestant View of Marriage

The reformer of Strasbourg, Martin Bucer (1494–1551), was more generous than most in his attitude toward women. Here, he argues that under certain circumstances a woman may leave her adulterous or abusive spouse and be free to remarry.

For the Holy Spirit says that there is neither male nor female in Christ. In all things that pertain to salvation one should have as much regard for woman as for man. For though she is bound to keep her place, to put herself under the authority of her husband, just as the church does in relation to Christ, yet her subjection does not cancel the right of an honest woman, in accordance with the laws of God, to have recourse to and demand, by legitimate means, deliverance from a husband who hates her. For the Lord has certainly not made married woman subservient to have her polluted and tormented by the extortions and injuries of her husband, but rather so that she may receive discipline from him, as if from her master and savior, like the church from Christ. A wife is not so subject to her husband that she is bound to suffer anything he

may impose upon her. Being free, she is joined to him in holy marriage that she may be loved, nourished, and maintained by him, as if she were his own flesh, just as the church is maintained by Christ. . . . Again, though a wife may be something less than her husband and subject to him, in order that they be rightly joined, the Holy Spirit has declared, through its apostle, that man and woman are equal before God in things pertaining to the alliance and mutual confederation of marriage. This is the meaning of the apostle's saying that a wife has power over the body of her husband, just as a husband has power over the body of his wife (1 Corinthians 7). . . . Hence, if wives feel that their association and cohabitation with their husbands is injurious to salvation as well of one as of the other, owing to the hardening and hatred on the part of their husbands, let them have recourse to the civil authority, which is enjoined by the Lord to help the afflicted.

Bucer, Martin. "De Regno Christi," book 2, chap. 34. In Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, *Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians*, pp. 200–201. New York: HarperCollins, 1973.


gun in the years after the Black Death, but in others it served primarily to increase the domain revenues of the crown. In Denmark, for example, 40 percent of the arable land was under direct royal control by 1620, primarily because the crown retained church lands confiscated during the Reformation.

The reformers also sought to change the status of European women. Beginning with Luther and Zwingli, they rejected the ideal of clerical celibacy and declared that a Christian marriage was the ideal basis for a godly life. They specifically attacked medieval writings that either condemned women as temptresses or extolled virginity as the highest of female callings, and drew attractive and sentimental portraits of the virtuous wife. A chief virtue of that ideal woman was her willingness to submit to male authority, but the attachment of the reformers to traditional social hierarchies should not be misinterpreted. The companionate marriage in which wife and husband offered each other mutual support was the Reformation ideal (see document 14.6). If women were subordinate it was, as Calvin said, because women "by the very order of nature are bound to obey."

To him, other reformers, and Catholic theologians, the traditionally ordered family was both part and symbol of a divinely established hierarchy. To disrupt that hierarchy risked chaos.

The Reformation endorsement of women was qualified, but it increased the status of wife and mother and placed new demands upon men, who were encouraged to treat their wives with consideration. As early as the 1520s, some German towns permitted women to divorce husbands who were guilty of gross abuse. The reformers also encouraged female literacy, at least in the vernacular, because they wanted women to have access to the Scriptures. The impact of these prescriptions on the lives of real women may be questioned. On the negative side, the Protestant emphasis on marriage narrowed a woman's career choices to one. Catholic Europe continued to offer productive lives to women who chose not to marry, but Protestant women could rarely escape the dominance of men. If they did, it was through widowhood or divorce, and Protestant societies offered no institutional support for the unmarried. St. Teresa de Avila, Angelique Arnauld, Madame Acarie,

Illustration 14.6

 **A Village Wedding.** In this painting, Pieter Bruegel the Younger illustrates the sort of peasant behavior that political and ecclesiastical authorities hoped to restrict in the later sixteenth century.



Jeanne de Chantal, and the other great female figures of post-Tridentine Catholicism had few Protestant counterparts.

From the standpoint of the reformers, whether Catholic or Protestant, such issues were of secondary importance. Their primary concern was the salvation of souls and the transformation of popular piety. Heroic efforts were made to catechize or otherwise educate the laity in most parts of Europe, and after about 1570 an increasing tendency was seen toward clerical interference in lay morals. Catholic church courts and Protestant consistories sought to eliminate such evils as brawling, public drunkenness, and sexual misbehavior. Inevitably the churchmen were forced to condemn the occasions on which such activity arose. The celebration of holidays and popular festivals came under scrutiny as did public performances of every kind from street jugglers to those of Shakespeare and his troop of actors. Dancing aroused special concern. No one worried about the stately measures trod by courtiers, but the rowdy and often sexually explicit dances of the peasants seemed, after years of familiarity, to induce shock (see illustration 14.6).

Civil authorities supported this attack on popular culture for practical reasons. The celebration of holidays and popular festivals encouraged disorder. When accompanied as they usually were by heavy drinking, public amusements could lead to violence and even riots. Moreover, like street theater, most celebrations contained seditious skits or pageants. They mocked the

privileged classes, satirized the great, and delighted in the reversal of social and gender roles. The triumph of a Lord of Misrule, even for a day, made magistrates nervous, and prudence demanded that such activities be regulated or prohibited outright. Popular beliefs and practices were attacked with equal vigor. The authorities rarely took action against academic magic, astrology, or alchemy—sciences that, though dubious, were widely accepted by the wealthy and educated—but they no longer tolerated folk magic. In some cases, official suspicion extended even to the traditional remedies used by midwives and village “wise women.”

The epidemic of witch hunting that convulsed Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may have been related to these concerns. In the century after 1550, Protestant and Catholic governments in virtually every part of Europe executed more than sixty thousand people for being witches or satanists. Medieval thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas had denied the power of witches, but a later age thought differently. Magistrates and learned men built theories of a vast satanic plot around their imperfect knowledge of folk beliefs. Their ideas crystallized in manuals for witch hunters, the most famous of which, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches) went through twenty-nine editions between 1495 and 1669. Its authors, like most people in early modern Europe, believed that in a providential world there could be no accidents; evil required an explanation. Otherwise unexplained disasters were caused by witches who gained extraordinary powers

through worshipping the devil and used those powers to injure their neighbors. The community could be protected only by burning witches alive.

In this case, ordinary people shared the concerns of the intellectual elite. Accusations of witchcraft tended to multiply in waves of hysteria that convulsed entire regions. Many of those denounced were no doubt guilty of trying to cast spells or some other unsavory act, but the victims fit a profile that suggests a generalized hostility toward women and perhaps that the persecutions were in part a means of exerting social control. The great majority of those burned were single women, old and poor, who lived at the margins of their communities. The rest, whether male or female, tended to be people whose assertive or uncooperative behavior had aroused hostility.

The trials subsided after 1650, but not before other traditional beliefs had been discredited by their association with witchcraft. Some of these involved "white" magic, the normally harmless spells and preparations used to ensure good harvests or to cure disease. Others were "errors," or what the Spanish Inquisition called "propositions." This was a broad category that included everything from the popular notion that premarital sex was no sin to alternative cosmologies devised by imaginative peasants. Post-Tridentine Catholicism, no less

than its Protestant rivals, discouraged uncontrolled speculation and was deeply suspicious of those forms of piety that lacked ecclesiastical sanction. Popular beliefs about the Virgin Mary, the saints, and miracles were scrutinized, while lay people claiming to have religious visions were ridiculed and sometimes prosecuted.

The efforts of the reformers, in other words, bore modest fruit. Drunkenness proved ineradicable, but some evidence is available that interpersonal violence decreased and that behavior in general became somewhat more sedate. Though lay morals and religious knowledge improved slowly if at all, the forms of piety were transformed in some cases beyond recognition. Many ideas and practices vanished so completely that historians of popular culture can recover their memory only with great difficulty. Devotion based upon personal contact with God through mental prayer became common in virtually all communions. Catholics abandoned the sale of indulgences and consciously sought to limit such abuses as the misuse of pilgrimages and relics. Protestants abandoned all three, together with Latin, vigils, the cult of the saints, masses for the dead, and mandatory fasts. By 1600, the religious landscape of Europe was transformed, and much of the richness, vitality, and cohesion of peasant life had been lost beyond all hope of recovery.