Burying Victims of the Black Death  This scene from Tournai, Flanders, captures the magnitude of the plague. (Copyright Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium)

- How well did inhabitants of the Latin West, rich and poor, urban and rural, deal with their natural environment?
- What social and economic factors led to the growth of cities in late medieval Europe?
- What factors were responsible for the promotion of learning and the arts in the Latin West?
- What social, political, and military developments contributed to the rise of European nations in this period?
In a span of four years, from 1347 to 1351, a devastating plague known as the Black Death killed a third of western Europe's population. A sense of the fragility of human life left a profound impression on Western art that persists to the present day. The relative prosperity that had characterized people's self-consciousness in 1200 was shattered, and it would take fully three centuries before Europe's population regained its previous size.

Although their contemporary Muslim and Byzantine neighbors commonly called western Europeans "Franks," western Europeans ordinarily referred to themselves as "Latins." That term underscored their allegiance to the Latin rite of Christianity (and to its patriarch, the pope) as well as the use of the Latin language by their literate
members. The Latin West deserves special attention because its achievements during this period had profound implications for the future of the world. The region was emerging from the economic and cultural shadow of its Islamic neighbors and, despite grave disruptions caused by plague and warfare, boldly setting out to extend its dominance. Some common elements promoted the Latin West's remarkable resurgence: competition, the pursuit of success, and the effective use of borrowed technology and learning.

Yet, in the summer of 1454, a year after the Ottoman Turks had captured the Greek Christian city of Constantinople, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini was trying to stir up support for a crusade to halt the Muslim advances that were engulfing southeastern Europe and that showed no sign of stopping. The man who in four years would become pope doubted that anyone could persuade the rulers of Christian Europe to take up arms against the Muslims: “Christendom has no head whom all will obey,” he lamented. “Neither the pope nor the emperor receives his due.” Indeed, French and English armies had been at war for more than a century, the German emperor presided over dozens of states that were virtually independent of his control, and the numerous kingdoms and principalities of Mediterranean Europe had never achieved unity. With only slight exaggeration Aeneas Sylvius complained, “Every city has its own king, and there are as many princes as there are households.”

Despite all these divisions, disasters, and wars, historians now see the period from 1200 to 1500 (Europe’s Late Middle Ages) as a time of unusual progress, in which splendid works of architecture were constructed, institutions of higher learning were founded, and urban culture was transformed in many ways. Although frequent wars caused havoc and destruction, they also promoted the development of more powerful weapons and more unified monarchies. A European fifty years later would have known that the Turks did not overrun Europe, that a truce in the Anglo-French conflict would hold, and that explorers sent by Portugal and a newly united Spain would extend Europe’s reach to other continents.

**Rural Growth and Crisis**

Between 1200 and 1500 the Latin West brought more land under cultivation, adopted new farming techniques, and made greater use of machinery and mechanical forms of energy. Yet for most rural Europeans—more than nine out of ten people were rural—this period was a time of calamity and struggle. Most rural men and women worked hard for meager returns and suffered mightily from the effects of famine, epidemics, warfare, and social exploitation. After the devastation caused from 1347 to 1351 by the plague known as the Black Death, social changes speeded up by peasant revolts released many persons from serfdom and brought some improvements to rural life.

**Peasants and Population**

Society was divided by class and gender. In 1200 most western Europeans were serfs, obliged to till the soil on large estates owned by the nobility and the church (see Chapter 9). Each noble household typically rested on the labors of fifteen to thirty peasant families. The standard of life in the lord’s stone castle or manor house stood in sharp contrast to that in the peasant’s one-room thatched cottage containing little furniture and no luxuries. Despite numerous religious holidays, peasant cultivators labored long hours, but more than half of the fruits of their labor went to the landowner. Because of these meager returns, serfs were not motivated to introduce extensive improvements in farming practices.

Scenes of rural life show both men and women at work in the fields, although there is no reason to believe that equality of labor meant equality of decision making at home. In the peasant’s hut, as elsewhere in medieval Europe, women were subordinate to men. The influential theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) spoke for his age when he argued that, although both

*Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini* (uh-NEE-uh-suhl-VEE-uh-pee-kuh-loh-nee)
### CHRONOLOGY

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1200 China's population may have surpassed Europe's by two to one; by 1300 the population of each was about 80 million. China's population fell because of the Mongol conquest (see Chapter 12). Why Europe's more than doubled between 1100 and 1345 is uncertain. Some historians believe that the reviving economy may have stimulated the increase. Others argue that warmer-than-usual temperatures reduced the number of deaths.
from starvation and exposure, while the absence of severe epidemics lessened deaths from disease.

Whatever the causes, more people required more productive ways of farming and new agricultural settlements. One new technique gaining widespread acceptance in northern Europe increased the amount of farmland available for producing crops. Instead of following the custom of leaving half of their land fallow (uncultivated) every year to regain its fertility, some farmers tried a new three-field system. They grew crops on two-thirds of their land each year and planted the third field in oats. The oats stored nitrogen and rejuvenated the soil, and they could be used to feed plow horses. In much of Europe, however, farmers continued to let half of their land lie fallow and to use oxen (less efficient but cheaper than horses) to pull their plows.

Population growth also led to the foundation of new agricultural settlements. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries large numbers of Germans migrated into the fertile lands east of the Elbe River and into the eastern Baltic states. Knights belonging to Latin Christian religious orders slaughtered or drove away native inhabitants who had not yet adopted Christianity. For example, during the thirteenth century, the Order of Teutonic Knights conquered, resettled, and administered a vast area along the eastern Baltic that later became Prussia (see Map 14.3). Other Latin Christians founded new settlements on lands conquered from the Muslims and Byzantines in southern Europe and on Celtic lands in the British Isles.

Draining swamps and clearing forests also brought new land under cultivation. But as population continued to rise, some people had to farm lands that had poor soils or were vulnerable to flooding, frost, or drought. As a result, average crop yields declined after 1250, and more people were vulnerable to even slight changes in the food supply resulting from bad weather or the disruptions of war. According to one historian, “By 1300, almost every child born in western Europe faced the probability of extreme hunger at least once or twice during
his expected 30 to 35 years of life. One unusually cold spell led to the Great Famine of 1315–1317, which affected much of Europe.

The Black Death and Social Change

The Black Death cruelly solved the problem of overpopulation by killing off a third of western Europeans. This terrible plague spread out of Asia and struck Mongol armies attacking the city of Kaffa on the Black Sea in 1346 (see Chapter 12). A year later Genoese traders in Kaffa carried the disease back to Italy and southern France. During the next two years the Black Death spread across Europe, sparing some places and carrying off two-thirds of the populace in others.

The plague’s symptoms were ghastly to behold. Most victims developed boils the size of eggs in their groin and armpits, black blotches on their skin, foul body odors, and severe pain. In most cases, death came within a few days. To prevent the plague from spreading, town officials closed their gates to people from infected areas and burned victims’ possessions. Such measures helped spare some communities but could not halt the advance of the disease across Europe (see Map 14.1). It is now believed that the Black Death was a combination of two diseases. One was anthrax, a disease that can spread to humans from cattle and sheep. The primary form of the Black Death was bubonic plague, a disease spread by contact with an infected person or from the bites of fleas that infest the fur of certain rats. But even if medieval Europeans had been aware of that route of infection, they could have done little to eliminate the rats, which thrived on urban refuse.

The plague left its mark on the survivors, bringing home how sudden and unexpected death could be. Some people became more religious, giving money to the church or flogging themselves with iron-tipped whips to atone for their sins. Others turned to reckless enjoyment, spending their money on fancy clothes, feasts, and drinking. Whatever their mood, most people soon resumed their daily routines.

Periodic returns of plague made recovery from population losses slow and uneven. By 1400 Europe’s population regained the size it had had in 1200. Not until after 1500 did it rise above its preplague level.

In addition to its demographic and psychological effects, the Black Death triggered social changes in western Europe. Skilled and manual laborers who survived demanded higher pay for their services. At first authorities tried to freeze wages at the old levels. Seeing such repressive measures as a plot by the rich, peasants rose up against wealthy nobles and churchmen. During a widespread revolt in France in 1358 known as the Jacquerie, peasants looted castles and killed dozens of persons. Urban unrest also took place. In a large revolt led by Wat Tyler in 1381, English peasants invaded London, calling for an end to all forms of serfdom and to most kinds of manorial dues. Angry demonstrators murdered the archbishop of Canterbury and many royal officials. Authorities put down these rebellions with even greater bloodshed and cruelty, but they could not stave off the higher wages and other social changes the rebels demanded.

Serfdom practically disappeared in western Europe as peasants bought their freedom or ran away. Free agricultural laborers used their higher wages to purchase land that they could farm for themselves. Some English landowners who could no longer afford to hire enough fieldworkers used their land to pasture sheep for their wool. Others grew less-labor-intensive crops or made greater use of draft animals and laborsaving tools. Because the plague had not killed wild and domesticated animals, more meat was available for each survivor and more leather for shoes. Thus the welfare of the rural masses generally improved after the Black Death, though the gap between rich and poor remained wide.

In urban areas employers had to raise wages to attract enough workers to replace those killed by the plague. Guilds (see page 390) found it necessary to reduce the period of apprenticeship. Competition within crafts also became more common. Although the overall economy shrank with the decline in population, per capita production actually rose.

**Mines and Mills**

Mining, metalworking, and the use of mechanical energy expanded so much in the centuries before 1500 that some historians have spoken of an "industrial revolution" in medieval Europe. That may be too strong a term, but the landscape fairly bristled with mechanical devices. Mills powered by water or wind were used to grind grain and flour, saw logs into lumber, crush olives, tan leather, make paper, and perform other useful tasks.
England's many rivers had some fifty-six hundred functioning watermills in 1086. After 1200 such mills spread rapidly across the western European mainland. By the early fourteenth century entrepreneurs had crammed sixty-eight watermills into a one-mile section of the Seine River in Paris. The flow of the river below turned the simplest water wheels. Greater efficiency came from channeling water over the top of the wheel. Dams ensured these wheels a steady flow of water throughout the year. Some watermills in France and England even harnessed the power of ocean tides.

Windmills were common in comparatively dry lands like Spain and in northern Europe, where ice made water wheels useless in winter. Water wheels and windmills had long been common in the Islamic world, but people in the Latin West used these devices on a much larger scale than did people elsewhere.

Wealthy individuals or monasteries built many mills, but because of the expenses involved groups of investors undertook most of the construction. Since nature furnished the energy to run them for free, mills could be very profitable, a fact that often aroused the jealousy of their neighbors. In his Canterbury Tales the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1340–1400) captured millers' unsavory reputation (not necessarily deserved) by portraying a miller as "a master-hand at stealing grain" by pushing down on the balance scale with his thumb.3

Waterpower also made possible such a great expansion of iron making that some historians say Europe's
real Iron Age came in the Late Middle Ages, not in antiquity. Water powered the stamping mills that broke up the iron, the trip hammers that pounded it, and the bellows (first documented in the West in 1323) that raised temperatures to the point where the iron was liquid enough to pour into molds. Blast furnaces capable of producing high-quality iron are documented from 1380. The finished products included everything from armor and nails to horseshoes and agricultural tools.

Iron mining expanded in many parts of Europe to meet the demand. In addition, new silver, lead, and copper mines in Austria and Hungary supplied metal for coins, church bells, cannon, and statues. Techniques of deep mining that developed in Central Europe spread farther west in the latter part of the fifteenth century. To keep up with a building boom France quarried more stone during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries than ancient Egypt had done during two millennia for all of its monuments.

The rapid growth of industry changed the landscape significantly. Towns grew outward and new ones were founded; dams and canals changed the flow of rivers; and the countryside was scarred by quarry pits and mines tunneled into hillsides. Pollution sometimes became a serious problem. Urban tanneries (factories that cured and processed leather) dumped acidic wastewater back into streams, where it mixed with human waste and the runoff from slaughterhouses. The first recorded antipollution law was passed by the English Parliament in 1388, although enforcing it was difficult.

One of the most dramatic environmental changes was increasing deforestation in the mid-fourteenth century. Trees were cut to provide timber for buildings and for ships. Tanneries stripped bark to make acid for tanning leather. Many forests were cleared to make room for farming. The glass and iron industries consumed great quantities of charcoal, made by controlled burning of oak or other hardwood. It is estimated that a single iron furnace could consume all the trees within five-eighths of a mile (1 kilometer) in just forty days. Consequently, the Late Middle Ages saw the depletion of many once-dense forests in western Europe.

**Urban Revival**

In the tenth century not a single town in the Latin West could compare in wealth and comfort—still less in size—with the cities in the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic caliphates. Yet by the later Middle Ages wealthy commercial centers stood all along the Mediterranean, Baltic, and Atlantic, as well as on major rivers draining into these bodies of water (see Map 14.2). The greatest cities in the East were still larger, but those in the West were undergoing greater commercial, cultural, and administrative changes. Their prosperity was visible in impressive new churches, guild halls, and residences. This urban revival is a measure of the Latin West's recovery from the economic decline that had followed the collapse of the Roman Empire (see Chapter 9) as well as an illustration of how the West's rise was aided by its ties to other parts of the world.

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**Trading Cities**

Most urban growth in the Latin West after 1200 was a result of the continuing growth of trade and manufacturing. Most of the trade was between cities and their hinterlands, but long-distance trade also stimulated urban revival. Cities in northern Italy in particular benefited from maritime trade with the bustling port cities of the eastern Mediterranean and, through them, with the great markets of the Indian Ocean and East Asia. In northern Europe commercial cities in the County of Flanders (roughly today's Belgium) and around the Baltic Sea profited from growing regional networks and from overland and sea routes to the Mediterranean.

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Interactive Map: Trade and Manufacturing in Medieval Europe

Venice's diversion of the Fourth Crusade into an assault in 1204 against the city of Constantinople temporarily removed an impediment to Italian commercial expansion in the eastern Mediterranean. By crippling this Greek Christian stronghold, Venetians were able to seize the strategic island of Crete in the eastern Mediterranean and expand their trading colonies around the Black Sea.

Another boon to Italian trade was the westward expansion of the Mongol Empire, which opened trade routes from the Mediterranean to China (see Chapter 12). In 1271 the young Venetian merchant Marco Polo set out to reach the Mongol court by a long overland trek across Central Asia. There he spent many years serving the emperor Kublai Khan as an ambassador and as the governor of a Chinese province. Some scholars question the truthfulness of Polo's later account of these adventures and of his treacherous return voyage through the Indian Ocean that finally brought him back to Venice in 1295,
Map 14.2 Trade and Manufacturing in Later Medieval Europe

The economic revival of European cities was associated with great expansion of commerce. Notice the concentration of wool and linen textile manufacturing in northern Italy, the Netherlands, and England; the importance of trade in various kinds of foodstuffs, and the slave-exporting markets in Cairo, Fez, and Kotor.
after an absence of twenty-four years. Few in Venice could believe Ptolemy's tales of Asian wealth.

Even after the Mongol Empire's decline disrupted the trans-Asian caravan trade in the fourteenth century, Venetian merchants continued to purchase the silks and spices that reached Constantinople, Beirut, and Alexandria. Three times a year galleys (ships powered by some sixty oarsmen each) sailed in convoys of two or three from Venice, bringing back some 2,000 tons of goods. Other merchants began to explore new overland or sea routes.

Venice was not the only Latin city whose trade expanded in the thirteenth century. The sea trade of Genoa on the west coast of northern Italy probably equaled that of Venice. Genoese merchants established colonies on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean and around the Black Sea as well as in the western Mediterranean. In northern Europe an association of trading cities known as the Hanseatic League traded extensively in the Baltic, including the coasts of Prussia, newly conquered by German knights. Their merchants ranged eastward to Novgorod in Russia and westward across the North Sea to London.

By the late thirteenth century Genoese galleys from the Mediterranean and Hanseatic ships from the Baltic were converging on a third area, the trading and manufacturing cities in Flanders. In the Flemish towns of Bruges, Ghent, and Ypres skilled artisans turned raw wool from English sheep into a fine cloth that was softer and smoother than the coarse "homespuns" from simple village looms. Dyed in vivid hues, these Flemish textiles appealed to wealthy Europeans who formerly had imported their fine textiles from Asia.

Along the overland route connecting Flanders and northern Italy, important trading fairs developed in the Champagne region of Burgundy. The Champagne fairs began as regional markets, meeting once or twice a year, where manufactured goods, livestock, and farm produce were exchanged. When Champagne came under the control of the king of France at the end of the twelfth century, royal guarantees of safe conduct to all merchants turned the regional markets into international fairs. A century later fifteen Italian cities had permanent consulates in Champagne to represent the interests of their citizens. The fairs were also important for currency exchange and other financial transactions. During the fourteenth century the volume of trade grew so large that it became cheaper to send Flemish woolens to Italy by sea than to send them overland on pack animals. As a consequence, the fairs of Champagne lost some of their international trade but remained important regional markets.

In the late thirteenth century higher English taxes made it more profitable to turn wool into cloth in England than to export it to Flanders. Raw wool exports from England fell from 35,000 sacks at the beginning of the fourteenth century to 8,000 in the mid-fifteenth. With the aid of Flemish textile specialists and the spinning wheels and other devices they introduced, English exports of wool cloth rose from 4,000 pieces just before 1350 to 54,000 a century later.

Local banking families also turned Florence into a center for high-quality wool making. In 1338 Florence manufactured 80,000 pieces of cloth, while importing only 10,000 from Flanders. These changes in the textile industry show how competition promoted the spread of manufacturing and encouraged new specialties.

Hanseatic (han-se-AT-ik) Bruges (broozh) Ghent (gent [hard g as in get]) Ypres (EE-pruh) Champagne (sham-PAIN)
Civic Life

Trading cities in Europe offered people more social freedom than did rural places. Most northern Italian and German cities were independent states, much like the port cities of the Indian Ocean Basin (see Chapter 13). Other European cities held special royal charters that exempted them from the authority of local nobles. Because of their autonomy, they were able to adapt to changing market conditions more quickly than were cities in China and the Islamic world that were controlled by imperial authorities. Social mobility was also easier in the Latin West because anyone who lived in a chartered city for over a year might claim freedom. Thus cities became a refuge for all sorts of ambitious individuals, whose labor and talent added to their wealth.

Cities were also home to most of Europe’s Jews. The largest population of Jews was in Spain, where earlier Islamic rulers had made them welcome. Many commercial cities elsewhere welcomed Jews for their manufacturing and business skills. Despite the official protection they received from Christian rulers and the church, Jews were subject to violent religious persecutions or expulsions (see Diversity and Dominance: Persecution and Protection of Jews, 1272–1349). Persecution peaked in times of crisis, such as during the Black Death. In the Spanish kingdom of Castile violent attacks on Jews were widespread in 1391 and brought the once vibrant Jewish community in Seville to an end. Terrified Jews left or converted to Christianity, but Christian fanaticism continued to rise over the next century, leading to new attacks on Jews and Jewish converts. In the Latin West only the papal city of Rome left its Jews undisturbed throughout the centuries before 1500.

Opportunities for individual enterprise in European cities came with many restrictions. In most towns and cities powerful associations known as guilds dominated civic life. A guild was an association of craft specialists, such as silversmiths, or of merchants that regulated the business practices of its members and the prices they charged. Guilds also trained apprentices and promoted members’ interests with the city government. By denying membership to outsiders and all Jews, guilds perpetuated
Persecution and Protection of Jews, 1272–1349

Because they did not belong to the dominant Latin Christian faith, Jews suffered from periodic discrimination and persecution. For the most part, religious and secular authorities tried to curb such anti-Semitism. Jews, after all, were useful citizens who worshiped the same God as their Christian neighbors. Still, it was hard to know where to draw the line between justifiable and unjustifiable discrimination. In his Summa Theologica, St. Thomas Aquinas tried to make this distinction with regard to attempts at forced conversion.

Now, the practice of the Church never held that the children of Jews should be baptized against the will of their parents. . . . Therefore, it seems dangerous to bring forward this new view, that contrary to the previously established custom of the Church, the children of Jews should be baptized against the will of their parents.

There are two reasons for this position. One stems from danger to faith. For, if children without the use of reason were to receive baptism, then after reaching maturity they could easily be persuaded by their parents to relinquish what they had received in ignorance. This would tend to do harm to the faith.

The second reason is that it is opposed to natural justice . . . it is a matter of natural right that a son, before he has the use of reason, is under the care of his father. Hence, it would be against natural justice for the boy, before he has the use of reason, to be removed from the care of his parents, or for anything to be arranged for him against the will of his parents.

The “new view” Aquinas opposed was much in the air, for in 1272 Pope Gregory X issued a decree condemning forced baptism. The pope’s decree reviews the history of papal protection given to the Jews, starting with a quotation from Pope Gregory I dating from 598, and decrees two new protections of Jews’ legal rights.

Even as it is not allowed to the Jews in their assemblies presumptuously to undertake for themselves more than that which is permitted them by law, even so they ought not to suffer any disadvantage in those [privileges] which have been granted them.

Although they prefer to persist in their stubbornness rather than to recognize the words of their prophets and the mysteries of the Scriptures, and thus to arrive at a knowledge of Christian faith and salvation; nevertheless, insomuch as they have made an appeal for our protection and help, we therefore admit their petition and offer them the shield of our protection through the clemency of Christ’s piety. In so doing we follow in the footsteps of our predecessors of happy memory, the popes of Rome—Calixtus, Eugene, Alexander, Clement, Celestine, Innocent, and Honorius.

We decree moreover that no Christian shall compel them or any one of their group to come to baptism unwillingly. But if any one of them shall take refuge of his own accord with Christians, because of conviction, then, after his intention will have been made manifest, he shall be made a Christian without any intrigue. For indeed that person who is known to come to Christian baptism not freely, but unwillingly, is not believed to possess the Christian faith.

Moreover, no Christian shall presume to seize, imprison, wound, torture, mutilate, kill, or inflict violence on them; furthermore no one shall presume, except by judicial action of the authorities of the country, to change the good customs in the land where they live for the purpose of taking their money or goods from them or from others.

In addition, no one shall disturb them in any way during the celebration of their festivals, whether by day or by night, with clubs or stones or anything else. Also no one shall exact any compulsory service of them unless it be that which they have been accustomed to render in previous times.

Insomuch as the Jews are not able to bear witness against the Christians, we decree furthermore that the testimony of Christians against Jews shall not be valid unless there is among these Christians some Jew who is there for the purpose of offering testimony.

Since it occasionally happens that some Christians lose their Christian children, the Jews are accused by their enemies of secretly carrying off and killing these same Christian children,
and of making sacrifices of the heart and blood of these very children. It happens, too, that the parents of these children, or some other Christian enemies of these Jews, secretly hide these very children in order that they may be able to injure these Jews, and in order that they may be able to extort from them a certain amount of money by redeeming them from their straits.

And most falsely do these Christians claim that the Jews have secretly and furtively carried away these children and killed them, and that the Jews offer sacrifice from the heart and the blood of these children, since their law in this matter precisely and expressly forbids Jews to sacrifice, eat, or drink the blood, or eat the flesh of animals having claws. This has been demonstrated many times in our court by Jews converted to the Christian faith: nevertheless very many Jews are often seized and detained unjustly because of this.

We decree, therefore, that Christians need not be obeyed against Jews in such a case or situation of this type, and we order that Jews seized under such a silly pretext be freed from imprisonment, and that they shall not be arrested henceforth on such a miserable pretext, unless—we do not believe—they be caught in the commission of the crime. We decree that no Christian shall stir up anything against them, but that they should be maintained in that status and position in which they were from the time of our predecessors, from antiquity till now.

We decree, in order to stop the wickedness and avarice of bad men, that no one shall dare to devastate a cemetery of the Jews or to dig up human bodies for the sake of getting money [by holding them for ransom]. Moreover, if anyone, after having known the content of this decree, should—which we hope will not happen—attempt audaciously to act contrary to it, then let him suffer punishment in his rank and position, or let him be punished by the penalty of excommunication, unless he makes amends for his boldness by proper recompense. Moreover, we wish that only those Jews who have not attempted to contrive anything toward the destruction of the Christian faith be fortified by the support of such protection. . . .

Despite such decrees, violence against Jews might burst out when fears and emotions were running high. This selection is from the official chronicles of the upper-Rhineländ towns.

In the year 1349 there occurred the greatest epidemic that ever happened. Death went from one end of the earth to the other, on that side and this side of the [Mediterranean] sea, and it was greater among the Saracens [Muslims] than among the Christians. In some lands everyone died so that no one was left. Ships were also found on the sea laden with wares; the crew had all died and no one guided the ship. The Bishop of Marseilles and priests and monks and more than half of all the people there died with them. In other kingdoms and cities so many people perished that it would be horrible to describe. The pope at Avignon stopped all sessions of court, locked himself in a room, allowed no one to approach him and had a fire burning before him all the time.

the interests of the families that already were members. They also perpetuated male dominance of most skilled jobs.

Nevertheless, in a few places women were able to join guilds either on their own or as the wives, widows, or daughters of male guild members. Large numbers of poor women also toiled in nonguild jobs in urban textile industries and in the food and beverage trades, generally receiving lower wages than men. Some women advanced socially through marriage. One of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales concerns a woman from Bath, a city in southern England, who became wealthy by marrying a succession of old men for their money (and then two other husbands for love), "aside from other company in youth." Chaucer says she was also a skilled weaver: "In making cloth she showed so great a bent. / She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent."

By the fifteenth century a new class of wealthy merchant-bankers operated on a vast scale and specialized in money changing, loans, and investments. The merchant-bankers handled the financial transactions of a variety of merchants as well as of ecclesiastical and secular officials. They arranged for the transmission to the pope of funds known as Peter's pence, a collection taken up annually in every church in the Latin West. Their loans supported rulers' wars and lavish courts. Some merchant-bankers even developed their own news services, gathering information on any topic that could affect business.

Florence became a center of new banking services, from checking accounts and shareholding companies to improved bookkeeping. In the fifteenth century the Medici family of Florence operated banks in Italy, Flanders, and London. Medicis also controlled the government of Florence and were important patrons of the arts. By 1500 the greatest banking family in western Europe

Medici (MED-ih-chee)
And from what this epidemic came, all wise teachers and physicians could only say that it was God’s will. And the plague was now here, so it was in other places, and lasted more than a whole year. This epidemic also came to Strasbourg in the summer of the above mentioned year, and it is estimated about sixteen thousand people died.

In the matter of this plague the Jews throughout the world were reviled and accused in all lands of having caused it through the poison which they are said to have put into the water and the wells—that is what they were accused of—and for this reason the Jews were burnt all the way from the Mediterranean into Germany, but not in Avignon, for the pope protected them there.

Nevertheless they tortured a number of Jews in Berne and Zofingen who admitted they had put poison into many wells, and they found the poison in the wells. Thereupon they burnt the Jews in many towns and wrote of this affair to Strasbourg, Freibourg, and Basel in order that they too should burn their Jews. . . . The deputies of the city of Strasbourg were asked what they were going to do with their Jews. They answered and said that they knew no evil of them. Then . . . there was a great indignation and clamor against the deputies from Strasbourg. So finally the Bishop and the lords and the Imperial Cities agreed to do away with the Jews. The result was that they were burnt in many cities, and wherever they were expelled they were caught by the peasants and stabbed to death or drowned. . . .

On Saturday—that was St. Valentine’s Day—they burnt the Jews on a wooden platform in their cemetery. There were about two thousand people of them. Those who wanted to baptize themselves were spared. Many small children were taken out of the fire and baptized against the will of their fathers and mothers. And everything that was owed to the Jews was cancelled, and the Jews had to surrender all pledges and notes that they had taken for debts. The council, however, took the cash that the Jews possessed and divided it among the working-men proportionately. The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews. If they had been poor and if the feudal lords had not been in debt to them, they would not have been burnt.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS
1. Why do Aquinas and Pope Gregory oppose prejudicial actions against Jews?
2. Why did prejudice increase at the time of the Black Death?
3. What factors account for the differences between the views of Christian leaders and the Christian masses?


was the Fuggers” of Augsburg, who had ten times the Medici bank’s lending capital. Starting out as cloth merchants under Jacob “the Rich” (1459–1525), the family branched into many other activities, including the trade in Hungarian copper, essential for casting cannon.

Christian bankers had to devise ways to profit indirectly from loans in order to get around the Latin Church’s condemnation of usury (charging interest). Some borrowers agreed to repay a loan in another currency at a rate of exchange favorable to the lender. Others added a “gift” in thanks to the lender to the borrowed sum. For example, in 1501 papal officials agreed to repay a loan of 6,000 gold ducats in five months to the Fuggers along with a “gift” of 400 ducats, amounting to an effective interest rate of 16 percent a year. In fact, the return was much smaller since the church failed to repay the loan on time. Because they were not bound by church laws, Jews were important moneylenders.

Despite the money made by some, for most residents of western European cities poverty and squalor were the norm. Even for the wealthy, European cities generally lacked civic amenities, such as public baths and water supply systems, that had existed in the cities of Western antiquity and still survived in cities of the Islamic Middle East.

Gothic Cathedrals    Master builders were in great demand in the thriving cities of late medieval Europe. Cities vied to outdo one another in the magnificence of their guild halls, town halls, and other structures (see Environment and Technology: The Clock). But the architectural wonders of their times were the new Gothic cathedrals, which made their appearance in about 1140 in France.

Fuggers (FOOG-uhrz)
The Clock

Clocks were a prominent feature of the Latin West in the late medieval period. The Song-era Chinese had built elaborate mechanical clocks centuries earlier (see Chapter 10), but the West was the first part of the world where clocks became a regular part of urban life. Whether mounted in a church steeple or placed on a bridge or tower, mechanical clocks proclaimed Western people's delight with mechanical objects, concern with precision, and display of civic wealth.

The word clock comes from a word for bell. The first mechanical clocks that appeared around 1300 in western Europe were simply bells with an automatic mechanical device to strike the correct number of hours. The most elaborate Chinese clock had been powered by falling water, but this was impractical in cold weather. The levers, pulleys, and gears of European clocks were powered by a weight hanging from a rope wound around a cylinder. An "escapement" lever regulated the slow, steady unwinding.

Enthusiasm for building expensive clocks came from various parts of the community. For some time, monks had been using devices to mark the times for prayer. Employers welcomed chiming clocks to regulate the hours of their employees. Universities used them to mark the beginning and end of classes. Prosperous merchants readily donated money to build a splendid clock that would display their city's wealth. The city of Strasbourg, for example, built a clock in the 1350s that included statues of the Virgin, the Christ Child, and the three Magi; a mechanical rooster; the signs of the zodiac; a perpetual calendar; and an astrolabe—and it could play hymns, too.

By the 1370s and 1380s clocks were common enough for their measured hours to displace the older system that varied the length of the hour in proportion to the length of the day. Previously, for example, the London hour had varied from thirty-eight minutes in winter to eighty-two minutes in summer. By 1500 clocks had numbered faces with hour and minute hands. Small clocks for indoor use were also in vogue. Though not very accurate by today's standards, these clocks were still a great step forward. Some historians consider the clock the most important of the many technological advances of the later Middle Ages because it fostered so many changes during the following centuries.

Early Clock: This weight-driven clock dates from 1454. (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Ms. Laud Misc. 570, 25v.)
The hallmark of the new cathedrals was the pointed Gothic arch, which replaced the older round Roman arch. External (flying) buttresses stabilized the high, thin stone columns below the arches. This method of construction enabled master builders to push the Gothic cathedrals to great heights and to fill the outside walls with giant windows of brilliantly colored stained glass. During the next four centuries, interior heights went ever higher, towers and spires pierced the heavens, and walls dazzled worshipers with religious scenes in stained glass.

The men who designed and built the cathedrals had little or no formal education and limited understanding of the mathematical principles of modern civil engineering. Master masons sometimes miscalculated, and parts of some overly ambitious cathedrals collapsed. For instance, the record-high choir vault of Beauvais Cathedral—154 feet (47 meters) in height—came tumbling down in 1284. But as builders gained experience, they devised new ways to push their steeples heavenward. The spire of the Strasbourg cathedral reached 466 feet (142 meters) into the air—as high as a forty-story building. Such heights were unsurpassed until the twentieth century.

LEARNING, LITERATURE, AND THE RENAISSANCE

Throughout the Middle Ages people in the Latin West lived amid reminders of the achievements of the Roman Empire. They wrote and worshiped in a version of its language, traveled its roads, and obeyed some of its laws. Even the vestments and robes of medieval popes, kings, and emperors were modeled on the regalia of Roman officials. Yet early medieval Europeans lost touch with much of the learning of Greco-Roman antiquity. More vivid was the biblical world they heard about in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

A small revival of classical learning associated with the court of Charlemagne in the ninth century was followed by a larger renaissance (rebirth) in the twelfth century. The growing cities were home to intellectuals, artists, and universities after 1200. In the mid-fourteenth century the pace of intellectual and artistic life quickened in what is often called the Renaissance, which began in northern Italy and later spread to northern Europe. Some Italian authors saw the Italian Renaissance as a sharp break with an age of darkness. A more balanced view might reveal this era as the high noon of a day that had been dawning for several centuries.

Universities and Learning

Before 1100 Byzantine and Islamic scholarship generally surpassed scholarship in Latin Europe. When southern Italy was wrested from the Byzantines and Sicily and Toledo from the Muslims in the eleventh century, many manuscripts of Greek and Arabic works came into Western hands and were translated into Latin for readers eager for new ideas. These included philosophical works by Plato and Aristotle; newly discovered Greek treatises

Aristotle (AR-ih-stah-tahl)
The prominence of theology partly reflected the fact that many students were destined for ecclesiastical careers, but theology was also seen as “queen of the sciences”—the central discipline that encompassed all knowledge. For this reason thirteenth-century theologians sought to synthesize the newly rediscovered philosophical works of Aristotle, as well as the commentaries of Avicenna, with the revealed truth of the Bible. Their daring efforts to synthesize reason and faith were known as scholasticism.

The most notable scholastic work was the Summa Theologica, issued between 1267 and 1273 by Thomas Aquinas, a brilliant Dominican priest who was a professor of theology at the University of Paris. Although Aquinas’s exposition of Christian belief organized on Aristotelian principles was later accepted as a masterful demonstration of the reasonableness of Christianity, scholasticism upset many traditional thinkers. Some church authorities even tried to ban Aristotle from the curriculum. There also was much rivalry between the leading Dominican and Franciscan theological scholars over the next two centuries. However, the considerable freedom of medieval universities from both secular and religious authorities eventually enabled the new ideas of accredited scholars to prevail over the fears of church administrators.

The intellectual achievements of the later Middle Ages were not confined to the universities. Talented writers of this era made important contributions to literature and literary scholarship. A new technology in the fifteenth century helped bring works of literature and scholarship to a larger audience.

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) completed a long, elegant poem, the Divine Comedy, shortly before his death. This supreme expression of medieval preoccupations tells the allegorical story of Dante’s journey through the nine circles of Hell and the seven terraces of Purgatory (a place where the souls not deserving eternal punishment were purged of their sinfulness), followed by his entry into Paradise. His guide through Hell and Purgatory is the
Dante's *Divine Comedy*

This fifteenth-century painting by Domenico di Michelino shows Dante holding a copy of the *Divine Comedy*. Hell is depicted to the poet's left and the terraces of Purgatory behind him, surmounted by the earthly and heavenly Paradise. The city of Florence, with its recently completed cathedral, appears on the right. (skg-images)

Roman poet Virgil. His guide through Paradise is Beatrice, a woman whom he had loved from afar since childhood and whose death inspired him to write the poem.

The *Divine Comedy* foreshadows some of the literary fashions of the later Italian Renaissance. Like Dante, later Italian writers made use of Greco-Roman classical themes and mythology and sometimes chose to write not in Latin but in the vernacular languages spoken in their regions, in order to reach broader audiences. (Dante used the vernacular spoken in Tuscany.)

The English poet Geoffrey Chaucer was another vernacular writer of this era. Many of his works show the influence of Dante, but he is most famous for the *Canterbury Tales*, the lengthy poem written in the last dozen years of his life. These often humorous and earthy tales, told by fictional pilgrims on their way to the shrine of Thomas à Becket in Canterbury, are cited several times in this chapter because they present a marvelous cross-section of medieval people and attitudes.

Dante also influenced the literary movement of the humanists that began in his native Florence in the mid-fourteenth century. The term refers to their interest in the humanities, the classical disciplines of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and ethics. With the brash exaggeration characteristic of new intellectual fashions, humanist writers such as the poet Francesco Petrarch* (1304–1374) and the poet and storyteller Giovanni Boccaccio* (1313–1375) claimed that their new-found admiration for the classical values revived Greco-Roman traditions that for centuries had lain buried under the rubble of the Middle Ages. This idea of a rebirth of learning long dead overlooks the fact that scholars at the monasteries and universities had been recovering and preserving all sorts of Greco-Roman learning for many centuries. Dante (whom the humanists revered) had anticipated humanist interests by a generation.

Yet it is hard to exaggerate the beneficial influences of the humanists as educators, advisers, and reformers. Their greatest influence was in reforming secondary education. Humanists introduced a curriculum centered on the languages and literature of Greco-Roman antiquity, which they felt provided intellectual discipline, moral

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*Tuscany* (TUS-kuh-nee)

*Francesco Petrarch* (fran-CHAHS-koh PAY-trahrk)

*Giovanni Boccaccio* (joo-VAH-nee boh-KAH-chee-oh)
lessons, and refined tastes. This curriculum dominated secondary education in Europe and the Americas well into the twentieth century. Despite the humanists’ influence, theology, law, medicine, and branches of philosophy other than ethics remained prominent in university education during this period. After 1500 humanist influence grew in university education.

Believing the pinnacle of learning, beauty, and wisdom had been reached in antiquity, many humanists tried to duplicate the elegance of classical Latin or Greek. Others followed Dante in composing literary works in vernacular languages. Boccaccio is most famous for his vernacular writings, especially the Decameron, an earthy work that has much in common with Chaucer’s boisterous tales. Under Petrarch’s influence, however, Boccaccio turned to writing in classical Latin, including De mulieribus claris (Famous Women), a chronicle of 106 famous women from Eve to his own day. It was the first collection of women’s lives in Western literature.

Once they had mastered classical Latin and Greek, a number of humanist scholars of the fifteenth century worked to restore the original texts of Greco-Roman writers and of the Bible. By comparing many different manuscripts, they eliminated errors introduced by generations of copyists. To aid in this task, Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447–1455) created the Vatican Library, buying scrolls of Greco-Roman writings and paying to have accurate copies and translations made. Working independently, the respected Dutch scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam (ca. 1466–1536) produced a critical edition of the New Testament in Greek. Erasmus was able to correct many errors and mistranslations in the Latin text that had been in general use throughout the Middle Ages. In later years this humanist priest and theologian also wrote—in classical Latin— influential moral guides, including the Enchiridion militis Christiani (The Manual of the Christian Knight, 1503) and The Education of a Christian Prince (1515).

The influence of the humanists was enhanced after 1450 because new printing technology increased the availability of their critical editions of ancient texts, literary works, and moral guides. The Chinese were the first to use carved wood blocks for printing (see Chapter 12), and block-printed playing cards from China were circulating in Europe before 1450. Then, around 1450, three technical improvements revolutionized printing: (1) movable pieces of type consisting of individual letters, (2) new ink suitable for printing on paper, and (3) the printing press, a mechanical device that pressed inked type onto sheets of paper.

Erasmus (uh-RAZ-muh)

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Renaissance Artists

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were as distinguished for their masterpieces of painting, sculpture, and architecture as they were for their scholarship. Although artists continued to depict biblical subjects, the spread of Greco-Roman learning led many artists, especially in Italy, to portray Greco-Roman deities and mythical tales. Another popular trend was depicting the scenes of daily life.

However, neither daily life nor classical images were entirely new subjects. Renaissance art, like Renaissance scholarship, owed a major debt to earlier generations. The Florentine painter Giotto (ca. 1267–1337) had a formidable influence on the major Italian painters of the fifteenth century, who credited him with single-handedly reviving the “lost art of painting.” In his religious scenes Giotto replaced the stiff, staring figures of the Byzantine style, which were intended to overawe viewers, with more natural and human portraits with whose emotions of grief and love viewers could identify. Rather than floating on backgrounds of gold leaf, his saints inhabit earthly landscapes.

Another important contribution to the early Italian Renaissance was a new painting technology from north

Johann Gutenberg (yoh-HAHN GOO-ten-berg)  Giotto (JAW-toh)
of the Alps. The Flemish painter Jan van Eyck* (ca. 1390–1441) mixed his pigments with linseed oil instead of the diluted egg yolk of earlier centuries. Oil paints were slower drying and more versatile, and they gave pictures a superior luster. Van Eyck's use of the technique for his own masterfully realistic paintings on religious and domestic themes was quickly copied by talented painters of the Italian Renaissance.

The great Italian Leonardo da Vinci* (1452–1519), for example, used oil paints for his famous Mona Lisa. Renaissance artists like Leonardo were masters of many media. His other works include the fresco (painting in wet plaster) The Last Supper, bronze sculptures, and imaginative designs for airplanes, submarines, and tanks. Leonardo's younger contemporary Michelangelo* (1472–1564) painted frescoes of biblical scenes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, sculpted statues of David and Moses, and designed the dome for a new Saint Peter's Basilica.

The patronage of wealthy and educated merchants and prelates did much to foster an artistic blossoming in the cities of northern Italy and Flanders. The Florentine banker Cosimo de Medici (1389–1464), for example, spent immense sums on paintings, sculpture, and public buildings. His grandson Lorenzo (1449–1492), known as "the Magnificent," was even more lavish. The church was also an important source of artistic commissions. Seeking to restore Rome as the capital of the Latin Church, the papacy launched a building program culminating in the construction of the new Saint Peter's Basilica and a residence for the pope.

These scholarly and artistic achievements exemplify the innovation and striving for excellence of the Late Middle Ages. The new literary themes and artistic styles of this period had lasting influence on Western culture. But the innovations in the organization of universities, in printing, and in oil painting had wider implications, for they were later adopted by cultures all over the world.

Jan van Eyck (yahn vahn ike)
Leonardo da Vinci (lay-own-AHR-doh dah VIN-chee)
Michelangelo (my-kahl AN-juh-loh)
papacy (PAY-puh-see)
POLITICAL AND MILITARY TRANSFORMATIONS

Stronger and more unified states and armies developed in western Europe in parallel with the economic and cultural revivals. In no case were transformations smooth and steady, and the political changes unfolded somewhat differently in each state (see Map 14.5). During and after the prolonged struggle of the Hundred Years War, French and English monarchs forged closer ties with the nobility, the church, and the merchants. The consolidation of Spain and Portugal was linked to crusades against Muslim states. In Italy and Germany, however, political power remained in the hands of small states and loose alliances.

Monarchs, Nobles, and Clergy

Thirteenth-century states still shared many features of early medieval states (see Chapter 9). Hereditary monarchs occupied the peak of the political pyramid, but their powers were limited by modest treasuries and the rights possessed by others. Below them came the powerful noblemen who controlled vast estates and whose advice and consent were often required on important matters of state. The church, jealous of its traditional rights and independence, was another powerful body within each kingdom. Towns, too, had acquired many rights and privileges. Indeed, the towns in Flanders, the Hanseatic League, and Italy were nearly independent from royal interference.

In theory, nobles were vassals of the reigning monarchs and were obliged to furnish them with armored knights in time of war. In practice, vassals sought to limit the monarch’s power and protect their own rights and privileges. The nobles’ privileged economic and social position rested on the large estates that had been granted to their ancestors in return for supporting and training knights in armor to serve in a royal army.

In the year 1200 knights were still the backbone of western European fighting forces, but two changes in weaponry were bringing their central military role, and thus the system of estates that supported them, into question. The first involved the humble arrow. Improved crossbows could shoot metal-tipped arrows with such force that they could pierce helmets and light body armor. Professional crossbowmen, hired for wages, became increasingly common and much feared. Indeed, a church council in 1139 outlawed the crossbow as being too deadly for use against Christians. The ban was largely ignored. The second innovation in military technology that weakened the feudal system was the firearm. This Chinese invention, using gunpowder to shoot stone or metal projectiles, further transformed the medieval army.

The church also resisted royal control. In 1302 the outraged Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1294–1303) went so far as to assert that divine law made the papacy superior to “every human creature,” including monarchs. This theoretical claim of superiority was challenged by force. Issuing his own claim of superiority, King Philip “the Fair” of France (r. 1285–1314) sent an army to arrest the pope. After this treatment hastened Pope Boniface’s death, Philip engineered the election of a French pope who established a new papal residence at Avignon in southern France in 1309.

With the support of the French monarchy, a succession of popes residing in Avignon improved church discipline—but at the price of compromising the papacy’s neutrality in the eyes of other rulers. Papal authority was further eroded by the Great Western Schism (1378–1415), a period when rival papal claimants at Avignon and Rome vied for the loyalties of Latin Christians. The conflict was eventually resolved by returning the papal residence to its traditional location, the city of Rome. The papacy regained its independence, but the long crisis broke the pope’s ability to challenge the rising power of the larger monarchies.

King Philip gained an important advantage at the beginning of his dispute with Pope Boniface when he persuaded a large council of French nobles to grant him the right to collect a new tax, which sustained the monarchy for some time. Earlier, by adroitly using the support of the towns, the saintly King Louis IX of France (r. 1226–1270) had been able to issue ordinances that applied throughout his kingdom without first obtaining the nobles’ consent. But later kings’ efforts to extend royal authority sparked prolonged resistance by the most powerful vassals.

English monarchs wielded more centralized power as a result of consolidation that had taken place after the Norman conquest of 1066. Anglo-Norman kings also extended their realm by assaults on their Celtic neighbors. Between 1200 and 1400 they incorporated Wales and reasserted control over most of Ireland. Nevertheless, English royal power was far from absolute. In the span of just three years the ambitions of King John (r. 1199–1216) were severely set back. First he was compelled to acknowledge the pope as his overlord (1213). Then he lost his bid to reassert claims to Aquitaine in southern France (1214). Finally he was forced to sign the Magna

Avignon (ah-vee-NYON)
Map 14.3 Europe in 1453

This year marked the end of the Hundred Years War between France and England and the fall of the Byzantine capital city of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks. Muslim advances into southeastern Europe were offset by the Latin Christian reconquests of Islamic holdings in southern Italy and the Iberian Peninsula and by the conversion of Lithuania.
The Magna Carta One of four extant copies, this document shows the ravages of time, but the symbolic importance of the charter King John of England signed under duress in 1215 for English constitutional history has not been diminished. Originally a guarantee of the barons' feudal rights, it came to be seen as a limit on the monarch's authority over all subjects. (The National Archives, Public Record Office and Historical Manuscripts Commission)

Carta ("Great Charter," 1215), which affirmed that monarchs were subject to established law, confirmed the independence of the church and the city of London, and guaranteed nobles' hereditary rights.

Separate from the challenges to royal authority by the church and the nobles were the alliances and conflicts generated by the hereditary nature of monarchial rule. Monarchs and their vassals entered into strategic marriages with a view to increasing their lands and their wealth. Such marriages showed scant regard for the emotions of the wedded parties or for "national" interests. Besides unhappiness for the parties involved, these marriages often led to conflicts over far-flung inheritances. Although these dynastic struggles and shifting boundaries make European politics seem chaotic in comparison with the empires of Asia, some important changes were emerging from them. Aided by the changing technology of war, monarchs were strengthening their authority and creating more stable (but not entirely fixed) state boundaries within which the nations of western Europe would in time develop. Nobles lost autonomy and dominance on the battlefield but retained their social position and important political roles.

The Hundred Years War, 1337–1453

The long conflict between the king of France and his vassals known as the Hundred Years War (1337–1453) was a key example of the transformation in politics and warfare. This long conflict set the power of the French monarchy against the ambitions of his vassals, who included the kings of England (for lands that belonged to their Norman ancestors) and the heads of Flanders, Brittany, and Burgundy. In typical fashion, the conflict grew out of a marriage alliance.

Princess Isabella of France married King Edward II of England (r. 1307–1327) to ensure that this powerful vassal remained loyal to the French monarchy. However, when none of Isabella's three brothers, who served in
turn as kings of France, produced a male heir, Isabella's son, King Edward III of England (r. 1327–1377), laid claim to the French throne in 1337. Edward decided to fight for his rights after French courts awarded the throne to a more distant (and more French) cousin. Other vassals joined in a series of battles for the French throne that stretched out over a century.

New military technology shaped the conflict. Early in the war, hired Italian crossbowmen reinforced the French cavalry; but arrows from another late medieval innovation, the English longbow, nearly annihilated the French force. Adopted from the Welsh, the 6-foot (1.8-meter) longbow could shoot farther and more rapidly than the crossbow. Although arrows from longbows could not pierce armor, in concentrated volleys they often found gaps in the knights' defenses or struck their less-well-protected horses. To defend against these weapons, armor became heavier and more encompassing, making it harder for a knight to move. A knight who was pulled off his steed by a foot soldier armed with a pike (hooked pole) was usually unable to get up to defend himself.

Firearms became prominent in later stages of the Hundred Years War. Early cannon were better at spooking the horses than at hitting rapidly moving targets. As cannon grew larger, they proved quite effective in blasting holes through the heavy walls of medieval castles and towns. The first use of such artillery, against the French in the Battle of Agincourt (1415), gave the English an important victory.

A young French peasant woman, Joan of Arc, brought the English gains to a halt. Believing she was acting on God's instructions, she donned a knight's armor and rallied the French troops, which defeated the English in 1429 just as they seemed close to conquering France. Shortly after this victory, Joan had the misfortune of falling into English hands. English churchmen tried her for witchcraft and burned her at the stake in 1431.

In the final battles of the Hundred Years War, French forces used large cannon to demolish the walls of once-secure castles held by the English and their allies. The truce that ended the struggle in 1453 left the French monarchy in firm control.

**New Monarchies in France and England**

The war proved to be a watershed in the political history of France and England. The new monarchs that emerged differed from their medieval predecessors in having greater centralization of power, more fixed "national" boundaries, and stronger representative institutions. English monarchs after 1453 strove to consolidate control within the British Isles, though the Scots strongly defended their independence. French monarchs worked to tame the independence of their powerful noble vassals. Holdings headed by women were especially vulnerable. Mary of Burgundy (1457–1482) was forced to surrender much of her family's vast holdings to the king. Anne of Brittany's forced marriage to the king led to the eventual incorporation of her duchy into France.

Changes in military technology helped undermine nobles' resistance. Smaller, more mobile cannon developed in the late fifteenth century blasted through their castle walls. More powerful hand-held firearms that could pierce even the heaviest armor hastened the demise of the armored knights. New armies depended less on knights from noble vassals and more on bowmen, pikemen, musketeers, and artillery units paid by the royal treasury.

The new monarchies tried several strategies to pay for their standing armies. Monarchs encouraged noble vassals to make monetary payments in place of military service and levied additional taxes in time of war. For example, Charles VII of France (r. 1422–1461) won the right to impose a land tax on his vassals that enabled him to pay the costs of the last years of war with England. This new tax sustained the royal treasury for the next 350 years.

Taxes on merchants were another important revenue source. The taxes on the English wool trade, begun by King Edward III, paid most of the costs of the Hundred Years War. Some rulers taxed Jewish merchants and extorted large contributions from wealthy towns. Individual merchants sometimes carried royal favor with loans, even though such debts could be difficult or dangerous to collect. For example, the wealthy fifteenth-century French merchant Jacques Coeur gained many social and financial benefits for himself and his family by lending money to important members of the French court, but he was ruined when his jealous debtors accused him of murder and had his fortune confiscated.

The church was a third source of revenue. The clergy often made voluntary contributions to a war effort. English and French monarchs gained further control of church funds in the fifteenth century by gaining the right to appoint important ecclesiastical officials in their realms. Although reformers complained that this subordinated the church's spiritual mission to political and economic concerns, the monarchs often used state power to enforce religious orthodoxy in their realms more vigorously than the popes had ever been able to do.
The shift in power to the monarchs and away from the nobility and the church did not deprive nobles of social privileges and special access to high administrative and military offices. Moreover, towns, nobles, and clergy found new ways to check royal power in the representative institutions that came into existence in England and France. By 1500 Parliament had become a permanent part of English government: the House of Commons represented the towns and the leading citizens of the counties. In France a similar but less effective representative body, the Estates General, represented the church, the nobles, and the towns.

**Iberian Unification**

The growth of Spain and Portugal into strong, centralized states was also shaped by struggles between kings and vassals, dynastic marriages and mergers, and warfare. But Spain and Portugal’s reconquest of Iberia from Muslim rule was also a religious crusade. Religious zeal did not rule out personal gain. The Christian knights who gradually pushed the borders of their kingdoms southward expected material rewards. The spoils of victory included irrigated farmland, cities rich in Moorish architecture, and trading ports with access to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Serving God, growing rich, and living off the labor of others became a way of life for the Iberian nobility.

The reconquest advanced in waves over several centuries. Christian knights took Toledo in 1085. The Atlantic port of Lisbon fell in 1147 with the aid of English crusaders on their way to capture the Holy Land. It became the new capital of Portugal and the kingdom’s leading city, displacing the older capital of Oporto, whose name (meaning “the port”) is the root of the word Portuguese. A Christian victory in 1212 broke the back of Muslim power in Iberia. During the next few decades Portuguese and Castilian forces captured the beautiful and prosperous cities of Cordova (1236) and

**Algarve** (ahl-GAHHRV)
Seville (1248) and in 1249 drove the Muslims from the southwestern corner of Iberia, known as Algarve ("the west" in Arabic). Only the small kingdom of Granada hugging the Mediterranean coast remained in Muslim hands.

By incorporating Algarve in 1249, Portugal attained its modern territorial limits. After a long pause to colonize, Christianize, and consolidate this land, Portugal took the Christian crusade to North Africa. In 1415 Portuguese knights seized the port city of Ceuta in Morocco, where they learned more about the trans-Saharan caravan trade in gold and slaves (see Chapter 13). During the next few decades, Portuguese mariners sailed down the Atlantic coast of Africa seeking access to this rich trade and alliances with rumored African Christians (see Chapter 15).

Although it took the other Iberian kingdoms much longer to complete the reconquest, the struggle served to bring them together and to keep their Christian religious zealotry at a high pitch. The marriage of Princess Isabella of Castile and Prince Ferdinand of Aragon in 1469 led to the permanent union of their kingdoms into Spain a decade later when they inherited their respective thrones. Their conquest of Granada in 1492 secured the final piece of Muslim territory in Iberia for the new kingdom.

The year 1492 was also memorable because of Ferdinand and Isabella's sponsorship of the voyage led by Christopher Columbus in search of the riches of the Indian Ocean (see Chapter 15). A third event that year also reflected Spain's crusading mentality. Less than three months after Granada's fall, the monarchs ordered all Jews to be expelled from their kingdoms. Efforts to force the remaining Muslims to convert or leave led to a Muslim revolt at the end of 1499 that was not put down until 1501. Portugal also began expelling Jews in 1493, including many thousands who had fled from Spain.

Comparative Perspectives

From 1200 to 1500 trade and commerce were as central to the growth of the Latin West as they were to Islamic Africa and Asia. Indeed, the cities and nation-states of northern and southern Europe, like those in tropical Africa, India, and Southeast Asia, not only prospered from international trade—they would not have prospered without it. This was the first age of great intercontinental and intercultural contacts, as shown by the documented travels of men like Marco Polo of Venice and Ibn Battuta of Morocco. As the rise of great cities and empires in Islamic Africa and Asia was made possible by sailors who had mastered the navigation of the Indian Ocean, so the great cities and states of the Latin West could not have arisen without the skills of those who made their living by trading throughout the Mediterranean and the North Sea. Cultural and intellectual development followed in the path of these new contacts: just as the new empires and city-states of tropical Africa and Asia facilitated the development of Islamic learning, so the cities and nation-states of late medieval Europe fostered the rise of Christian learning and culture.

From a global perspective, these centuries marked the Latin West's change from a region dependent on cultural and commercial flows from the East to a region poised to export its own culture and impose its power on other parts of the world. It is one of history's great ironies that many of the tools that the Latin West used to challenge Eastern supremacy had originally been borrowed from the East. Medieval Europe's mills, printing, firearms, and navigational devices owed much to Eastern designs, just as its agriculture, alphabet, and numerals had in earlier times. Western Europe's success depended as much on strong motives for expansion as on adequate means. Long before the first voyages overseas, population pressure, religious zeal, economic motives, and intellectual curiosity had expanded the territory and resources of the Latin West. From the late eleventh century onward, such expansion of frontiers was notable in the establishment of crusader outposts in the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea, in the massive German settlement east of the Elbe River, and in the reconquest of southern Iberia from the Muslims.
SUMMARY

- How well did inhabitants of the Latin West, rich and poor, urban and rural, deal with their natural environment?
- What social and economic factors led to the growth of cities in late medieval Europe?
- What factors were responsible for the promotion of learning and the arts in the Latin West?
- What social, political, and military developments contributed to the rise of European nations in this period?

From an ecological perspective, the later medieval history of the Latin West is a story of triumphs and disasters. Westerners excelled in harnessing the inanimate forces of nature. The mechanical energy produced by water wheels and windmills was used to grind grain into flour, saw logs into lumber, crush olives, tan leather, and make paper. Waterpower facilitated growth in the manufacture of iron products such as armor, nails, and horseshoes, while silver, lead, and copper mines supplied metal for coins, church bells, and cannon. Such industry altered the landscape dramatically: dams and canals changed the flow of rivers, the countryside was scarred by quarry pits and mines, and water pollution became a problem. Logging cleared farmland and yielded timber but severely depleted many once-dense forests. After a period of considerable population growth, the Black Death swept through Europe in the mid-fourteenth century, killing a third of its population. Social life was characterized by deep divisions: the rich lived in luxury while the majority were compelled to pay landowners more than half of all they produced.

Towns and cities expanded because of the growth in trade and manufacturing. Cities in northern Italy benefited from trade with cities in the eastern Mediterranean and the markets of the Indian Ocean and East Asia. In northern Europe the cities of the Hanseatic League expanded their trade eastward to Novgorod and westward to London. Flemish towns prospered as centers for the manufacture of textiles, and England and northern Italy became major exporters of wool cloth. In most urban areas commercial life was dominated by guilds. Though serving their members’ interests, guilds denied membership to outsiders and Jews and perpetuated male dominance of most occupations. In the fifteenth century a new class of merchant-bankers arose. Despite the church’s condemnation of usury, bankers found other ways to profit from loans, and Jews became important moneylenders. Working with skilled artisans, master builders constructed the Gothic cathedrals of Europe, which dominated the skyline for miles.

The pursuit of knowledge in the sciences and humanities flourished in this period: many universities were founded, and successful students were awarded teaching diplomas and advanced degrees. All courses were taught in Latin, and theology was viewed as the central discipline that encompassed all knowledge. Artistic achievements included works of literature by authors such as Dante and Chaucer that were written in the vernacular. Drawing their inspiration from authors of Greek and Latin antiquity, humanists introduced a curriculum that dominated secondary education in Europe and the Americas into the twentieth century. Their influence was enhanced by the invention of new printing technology, as illustrated by the Gutenberg Bible. This period was also distinguished by great works of painting and sculpture that were commissioned by wealthy merchants and prelates.

In the thirteenth century European states were structured much as they had been in the early medieval period, with a monarch as head of state supported by a wealthy nobility, powerful clergymen, and a large class of farmers and skilled laborers. But innovations in weaponry such as the crossbow and firearms, which figured significantly in the Hundred Years War, began to challenge the class of knights and the feudal system. Increasingly dependent on bowmen, musketeers, and artillery units, new monarchies paid for standing armies by encouraging nobles to offer financial rather than military assistance, taxing merchants, and enlisting the clergy to make voluntary contributions for their wars. The Great Western Schism weakened the church and papal authority. Ultimately, the towns, nobles, and clergy found ways to check royal power through representative political institutions such as the English Parliament and the Estates General in France.
KEY TERMS

Latin West  p. 382
three-field system  p. 384
Black Death  p. 385
water wheel  p. 386
Hanseatic League  p. 389
guild  p. 390
Gothic cathedral  p. 393
Renaissance (European)  p. 395
universities  p. 396
scholasticism  p. 396
humanists (Renaissance)  p. 397
printing press  p. 398
Great Western Schism  p. 400
Hundred Years War  p. 402
new monarchies  p. 403
reconquest of Iberia  p. 404

SUGGESTED READING


For social history see Georges Duby, Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West (1985); for the earlier centuries, George Haggard, After the Black Death: A Social History of Early Modern Europe (1980), takes the analysis past 1500. Brief lives of individuals are found in Eileen Power, Medieval People, new ed. (1997), and Frances Gies and Joseph Gies, Women in the Middle Ages (1978). More systematic are the essays in Mary Eiler and Maryanne Kowalski, eds., Women and Power in the Middle Ages (1988). Vita Sackville-West, Saint Joan of Arc (1926; reprint, 1991), is a readable introduction to this extraordinary person.


NOTES


