

# The Early Middle Ages

After the collapse of Rome, Western Europe entered a period of political, social, and economic decline. From about 500 to 1000, invaders swept across the region, trade declined, towns emptied, and classical learning halted. For those reasons, this period in Europe is sometimes called the “Dark Ages.” However, Greco-Roman, Germanic, and Christian traditions eventually blended, creating the **medieval civilization**. This period between ancient times and modern times – from about 500 to 1500 – is called the **Middle Ages**.

## The Frankish Kingdom

The Germanic tribes that conquered parts of the Roman Empire included the Goths, Vandals, Saxons, and **Franks**. In 486, **Clovis**, king of the Franks, conquered the former Roman province of Gaul, which later became France. He ruled his land according to Frankish custom, but also preserved much of the Roman legacy by converting to Christianity. In the 600s, Islamic armies swept across North Africa and into Spain, threatening the Frankish kingdom and Christianity. At the battle of **Tours** in 732, **Charles Martel** led the Frankish army in a victory over Muslim forces, stopping them from invading France and pushing farther into Europe. This victory marked Spain as the furthest extent of Muslim civilization and strengthened the Frankish kingdom.

## Charlemagne

In 768, the grandson of Charles Martel became king of the Franks. He briefly united Western Europe when he built an empire reaching across what is now France, Germany, and part of Italy. He became known as **Charlemagne**, or **Charles the Great**. He was also declared a new Roman emperor, when in 800 the pope in Rome placed a crown on his head as a show of gratitude for helping put down a rebellion. This act linked the Germanic Frankish kingdom with the Christian Church in Rome. Charlemagne then set out to create a united Christian Europe by spreading Christianity to conquered people. Charlemagne viewed education as another way to unify his kingdom. He **revived Latin learning** throughout his empire by creating local schools and bringing the best scholars of Europe to his court at Aachen.

After Charlemagne died in 814, his heirs battled for control of the empire, finally dividing it into three regions with the **Treaty of Verdun**. Although Europe lost its unity, Charlemagne left a lasting legacy of extending Christian civilization into northern Europe and setting up a strong government.



## Viking Raiders

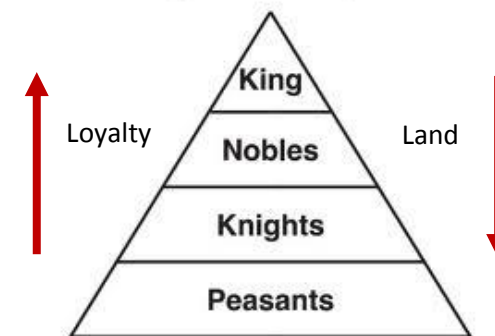
The **Vikings** broke the last threads of unity in Charlemagne’s empire. They were expert sailors, and starting in the late 700s, they burst out of **Scandinavia** – a northern region that now includes Norway, Sweden, and Denmark – and began attacking communities along the coasts and rivers of Europe. They were also traders and explorers who sailed around the Mediterranean Sea and across the Atlantic Ocean. Around the year 1000 they set up a short-lived colony in North America. Vikings opened trade route that linked Europe to Mediterranean lands. They also settled in England, Ireland, northern France, and Russia. As a result of the threat that Vikings posed, Europe developed a system of rule in which local lords had a great deal of power in order to protect their people. This system became known as **feudalism**.

# Feudalism and the Manor Economy

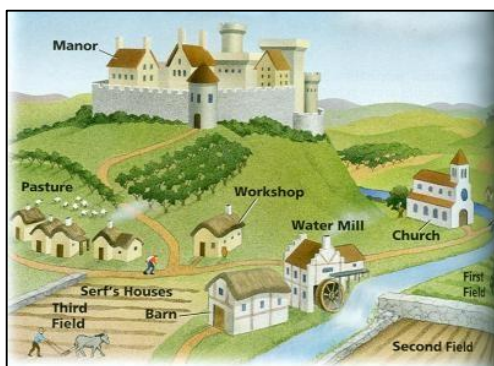
## Feudalism

A new **decentralized political and economic system** governed European life during the Middle Ages. **Feudalism** was a loosely organized system of rule in which powerful local lords divided their landholdings among lesser lords. In exchange, these lesser lords, or **vassals**, pledged service and loyalty to the greater lord. The political and economic relationship between lords and vassals was based on the exchange of land for loyalty and military service. Under this system, a powerful lord granted his vassal a **fief**, or estate. The fief included land, peasants that lived and worked on the land, and towns and buildings within it. As part of this agreement, the lord promised to protect his vassal and the vassal pledged military service and money to the lord.

European Feudal System



## The Manor: A Lord's Estate



## Manors: A Self-Sufficient World

The heart of the feudal economy was the **manor**, or lord's estate. Most manors included one or more villages and the surrounding lands. Peasants, who made up the majority of the population in medieval society, lived and worked on the manor. Most peasants on a manor were **serfs**, bound to the land. Peasants and their lords were tied together by mutual rights and obligations. Peasants had to farm the lord's land, repair parts of the town, ask the lord's permission to marry, and pay taxes. In return for their labor peasants had the right to food, housing, and land, and were protected during war. During the Middle Ages, the manor was generally **self-sufficient**. The peasants who live there produced almost everything they needed. A typical manor included a village, a water mill to grind grain, a church, and the lord's manor house. The fields surrounding the village were divided into strips for each family to farm. Beyond that lay pastures for animals and forests for hunting. Most peasants did not leave the manor and had education or knowledge of the outside world.

## Society during the Middle Ages

For medieval nobles, warfare was a way of life. Many nobles began training in boyhood to be a **knight**. After years of strict training in combat and discipline, a knight was ready to fight. They usually fought on horseback using swords, axes, and lances. Knights lived within a lord's **castle** and were sworn to protect him, as well as serve with bravery and honor. This code of conduct for knights was called **chivalry**. Knights were also expected to protect the weak, including peasants and noblewomen. Noblewomen played active roles in medieval society. While her husband or father was off fighting, the "lady of the manor" took over his duties. However, women's rights were generally restricted during this time, and although women could inherit land, usually land was passed to the eldest son in a family. Daughters of nobles were sent away for training in weaving, spinning, and sometimes even reading and writing, and were expected to be dutiful to their husband. Life for peasants was harsh; men, women, and children all worked long hours in the field. As a result of their poor diet and living conditions on the manor, peasants rarely lived over the age of 35.

# The Age of Faith

During the Middle Ages, two distinct churches emerged: the Orthodox Christian Church in the east and the **Roman Catholic Church** in the west. The Roman Catholic Church became the main stabilizing force in Western Europe, as strong government no longer existed after the fall of Rome. The Church provided both religious and secular leadership, and played a key role in reviving and preserving learning.

## The Power of the Church

The main responsibility of the Church was to serve the spiritual needs of medieval society. Local priests instructed peasants and townspeople in the faith and provided comfort to them in troubled time. They provided **sacraments**, or sacred spiritual rituals that were required to achieve salvation. During the Middle Ages the Church also filled many **secular**, or worldly roles. It was the largest landholder in Europe, which gave it great economic power, and had its own set of laws, called **canon law**. The leaders of the Church claimed papal **supremacy**, or authority over all the kings and queens of Europe. Individuals or leaders who went against the church could be **excommunicated**, or denied the sacraments. Whole towns or kingdoms could be denied the sacraments via an **interdict**. Essentially, not receiving sacraments condemned one to hell.

### Social

- Set up local churches
- Provided care for the sick and poor
- Excommunication
- Festivals and ceremonies
  - Mass, wedding, baptism, burial

### Economic

- **Tithe**
  - 10% tax paid to the church
- Largest landholder in Europe
- Agricultural and commercial activity in monasteries

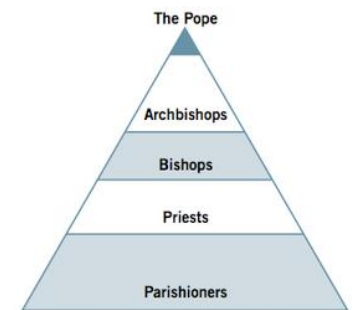
### Political

- Canon law
- **Inquisition** – Church court
- Papal Supremacy
- Interdict
- Crusades



## Church Hierarchy

At the head of the Roman Catholic Church was the **pope**, whom followers believed to be the spiritual representative of God on earth. Below the pope came archbishops, bishops, and local priests. Parishioners are those that worship in and belong to a specific church.



## Monastic Orders

Some men and women became **monks** or **nuns**, leaving worldly society and devoting their lives to God. They entered **monasteries** and **convents**, communities where Christian men or women focused on their spiritual lives. Monks and nuns took vows to live in poverty and chastity, or purity. Monks and nuns fulfilled many social needs, such as tending to the sick, helping the poor, and educating children. Many of them also became **missionaries**, spreading the Christian faith to other lands.



# The Commercial Revolution

Changes in Europe by 1000 A.D. set the foundation for economic prosperity throughout the rest of the Middle Ages. Peasants adopted new farming technologies, such as the **iron plow**, and new techniques, such as the **three-field system**. With more food available, the population began to grow. Trade also increased to meet a growing demand for goods. Trade organizations, such as the **Hanseatic League** in Northern Europe, were formed to protect trading interests. As food surplus, population, and trade all increased, cities and towns also grew throughout Europe.



## The Commercial Revolution

As trade revived, the use of money increased. In time, the need for **capital**, or money for investment, stimulated the growth of banks. Many new ways of doing business were also developed. **Credit** was extending by merchants to be paid back at a later time. Groups of merchants joined together in **partnerships**, where funds were pooled to finance large-scale ventures that would be too costly for an individual businessman. Merchants also developed a system of **insurance** to protect their interests. These new business practices were part of a commercial revolution that transformed the medieval economy. It also transformed medieval society by undermining the feudal system. The use of money changed the relationship between feudal lord and the serfs living on the land, eventually leading to serfs leaving the land for cities and other jobs.

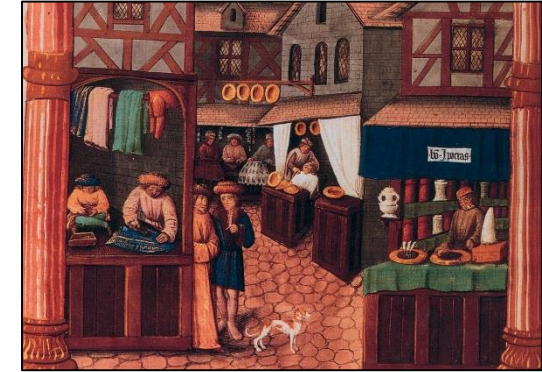


## The Rise of the Middle Class

In towns, the old social order of nobles, clergy, and peasants gradually changed. By the year 1000, merchants, traders, and artisans formed a new social group called the middle class. In medieval towns, the middle class gained economic and political power. Merchants and artisans formed **guilds**, associations that represented workers in one occupation and protected their interests. It took years to become a member of a guild. At an early age, an **apprentice** would begin training with a guild master to learn a specific trade. The guild master paid no wages, but was required to give the apprentice food and housing. After many years of work a guild member might be able to own their own business.

## Town and City Life

Medieval towns and cities were surrounded by high, protective walls. As a city grew, it became overcrowded and there were very poor conditions for the city dwellers. There were no garbage collections or sewer systems in medieval Europe, instead people threw their waste into the street. Towns were filthy, smelly, noisy, and crowded. Disease quickly spread in this environment. As a result of the close houses and other buildings, fires also spread quickly and often whole cities were burned.

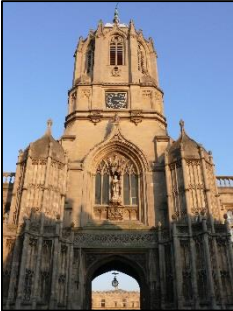


# Medieval Culture & Achievements

## Medieval Universities Develop

As economic and political conditions improved during the High Middle Ages, the need for education expanded. The Church and royal rulers both desired better educated, literate individuals, and by the 1100s, schools had sprung up around cathedrals to train the clergy. **Universities** also developed a program of study that covered the liberal arts: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, grammar, rhetoric, and logic. There were separate programs for the study of law, medicine, and theology. Ancient texts from Aristotle and other Greek thinkers were brought to Europe by Islamic scholars, but did not fit within the teachings of the Catholic Church.

**Thomas Aquinas** brought together Christian faith and classical Greek philosophy by concluding that faith and reason exist in harmony.



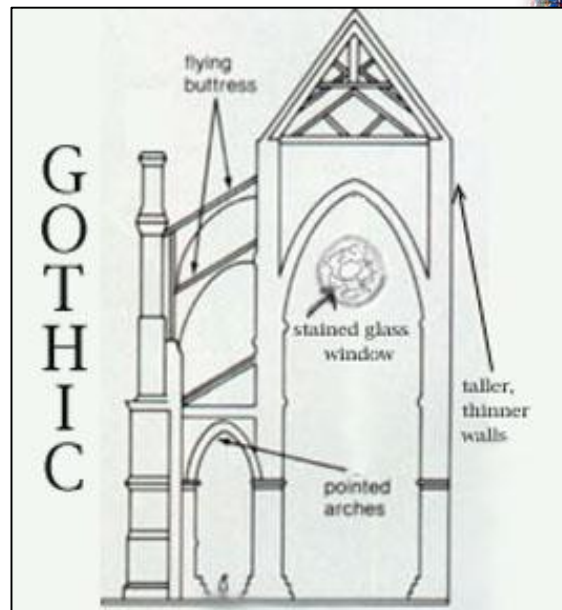
## Medieval Literature

While Latin remained the written language of scholars and churchmen, new writings began to appear in the **vernacular**, or the everyday languages of ordinary people, such as French, German, and Italian. Medieval literature included epics about knights and chivalry as well as tales of the common people. The most popular one was the **Song of Roland**, written around 1100, which praises the courage of one of Charlemagne's knights. Italian poet Dante Alighieri wrote the **Divine Comedy** in the early 1300s. In it he describes a journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven, and summarizes Christian ethics, showing how people's actions in life determine their fate in the afterlife. In the **Canterbury Tales**, the English writer Geoffrey Chaucer portrays medieval life by describing a band of pilgrims' travels to Saint Thomas Becket's tomb and the characters they meet along the way.



## Architecture and Art

In the High Middle Ages architects developed the **Gothic** style of architecture. Its most important feature was the **flying buttresses**, or stone supports that stood outside the church. These supports allowed builders to construct higher, thinner walls and leave space for large **stained-glass** windows. As churches rose, stonemasons carved sculptures to decorate them with scenes from the Bible. At the same time, other skilled craft workers created stained-glass windows by staining small pieces of glass in different colors. These religious pictures helped educate the many people who were unable to read. Churches also contained religious paintings called altarpieces. The purpose of these paintings was to symbolize religious ideas.



# English and French Monarchies

During the early Middle Ages monarchs in Europe stood at the head of society but had limited power. Nobles and the Church had their own courts, collected their own taxes, and fielded their own armies. During the High Middle Ages – about 1000 to 1300 – monarchs were able to centralize power.

## England



In 1066 William, Duke of Normandy in France, laid claim to the English crown and defeated his rival at the **Battle of Hastings**. **William the Conqueror**, as he was now known, set out to impose control over the land. He granted fiefs to the Church and loyal lords, and required every vassal to swear allegiance to him. William also had a census taken and recorded in the **Domesday Book**, which enabled him to set up an efficient system of tax collection. In 1154, Henry II inherited the throne and went on to broaden the system of royal justice by expanding accepted customs into law. This new system, called **common law**, applied to all of England and tied subjects to the king, rather than local lords. Other English kings struggled to impose royal authority amongst traditional feudalism. In 1215, nobles forced King John to sign the **Magna Carta**, which asserted that nobles had certain rights and the king had to equally obey the law. Eventually, these rights were extended to all English citizens. That king also agreed to not raise taxes without first consulting a council of lords and clergy. This council eventually evolved into the English Parliament. In 1295, King Edward I created what became known as the **Model Parliament**, which included not only the lords and clergy, but also representatives of the “common people.” This assembly became the “model” for England’s Legislature: the House of Lords with nobles and high clergy and the House of Commons with knights and middle-class citizens. This enabled the English to limit the power of the monarch.

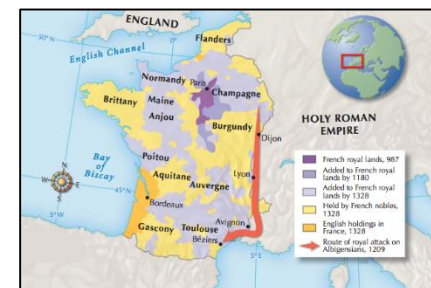
## France



In 987, nobles elected **Hugh Capet**, the count of Paris, to become king of France. Capet and his heirs went on to increase royal power. First, they made the throne hereditary, passing it from father to son. The **Capetian dynasty** lasted for 300 years, making the kingdom more stable. Next, they added to their lands by defeating nobles and winning the support of the Church. Most importantly, the Capetians built an effective bureaucracy in which government officials collected taxes and imposed royal law over the king’s lands. In 1179, Philip II became king of France. He was able to dramatically increase royal landholdings by gaining control of English-ruled lands in France and large areas in southern France that bordered on the Mediterranean Sea. Another monarch, Louis IX, strengthened the Church within France by persecuting heretics, or those who held beliefs contrary to Church teachings. Louis did much to improve royal government, including outlawing private wars, ending serfdom in his personal domain, and expanding the royal courts. Louis’ grandson, Philip IV, set up the **Estates General** in 1302. This body had representatives from all three estates, or classes of French society: clergy, nobles, and townspeople. Although later French kings consulted the Estates General, it never was effective at limiting royal power.

## The Magna Carta – 1215

- We have granted to all the freemen of our Kingdom, for us and our heirs, forever, all the underwritten Liberties...**
- No freeman shall be seized, or imprisoned...nor will we condemn him, nor will we commit him to prison, excepting by the legal judgment of his peers, or by the laws of the land.**
- To none will we sell, to none will we deny, to none will we delay right of justice.**



# The Hundred Years' War

English rulers had battled for centuries to hold onto the French lands of their Norman ancestors, but French rulers were also intent on extending their own power. Between 1337 and 1453, England and France engaged in a series of conflicts, known as the Hundred Years' War.

## English Success

At first, the English won a string of victories at Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt. They owed much of their success to the new longbow wielded by English archers. However, in what seemed like a miracle to the French, their fortunes were reversed when in 1429 a 17 year old peasant woman named Joan of Arc appeared to lead the French armies to victory.

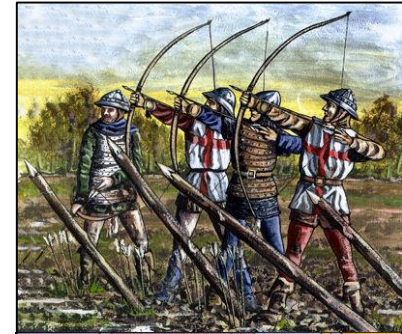
## Joan of Arc

**Joan of Arc** appeared in the court of Charles VII and told him that God had sent her to save France. Desperate, Charles authorized her to lead an army against the English. Joan went on to inspire the battered French troops and planted the seeds for future triumphs. However, Joan paid for success with her life. She was taken captive by the English, put on trial for witchcraft, and **burned at the stake**. Much later, the Church declared her a saint. The execution of Joan only served to rally the French, who saw her as a **martyr**.



## The English Longbow

The English were able to conquer most of Northern France until Joan of Arc appeared to lead the French to victories and inspire further successes.



## Effects of the Hundred Years' War

By 1453, the English were defeated. The Hundred Years' War ended English hopes for a continental empire and increased national feeling in France. French kings were able to expand their power. On the other hand, during the war, English rulers repeatedly turned to Parliament for funds, which helped that body win the "power of the purse." Power in English government began to swing towards Parliament. The Hundred Years' War also brought many changes to the late medieval world. Castles and armored knights were doomed to disappear because their defense could not stand up to the more deadly firepower of the longbow and the cannon. Society was also changing. Monarchs were able to build their own armies and depended less on feudal lords.

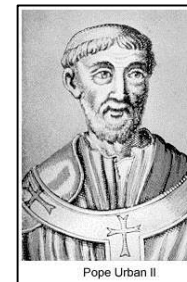


# The Crusades

Around 1000, as Western Europe was just emerging from a period of isolation, many other civilizations were thriving elsewhere. The religion of Islam had given rise to a brilliant civilization that stretched from present-day Spain to India. In the 1050s, the **Seljuk Turks** invaded the Byzantine Empire and took control of the **Holy Land**, that is, Jerusalem and other places in the Middle East important to Christianity. Beginning in 1096, Christians battled Muslims for control of lands in the Middle East in a series of wars known as the **Crusades**. Over the next 200 years, Western European interactions with advanced civilizations served to accelerate change at home.

## Motivations for the Crusades

In the late-1000s, **Pope Urban II** called for Christian knights to fend off attacks in the Byzantine Empire and provide safe passage for Christian pilgrims making their way to the Holy Land. Motivated by **religious zeal**, wealth, land, and adventure, thousands of knights and ordinary men and women left for the Holy Land starting in 1096. The pope hoped to increase his power in Europe and heal divisions within the Christian Church.



Pope Urban II

**“God wills it!”**

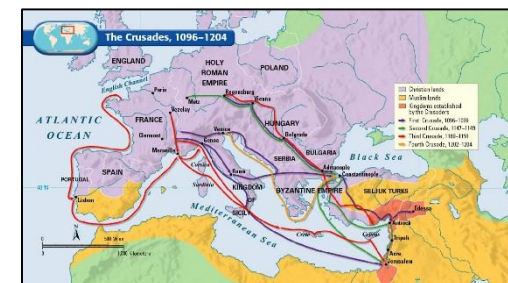
## The Crusades

Only the First Crusade came close to achieving its goals. Christian knights were able to capture Jerusalem in 1099, but the crusades continued off and on for over 200 years. In 1187, Jerusalem fell to the Muslims, led by a great general named **Saladin**. In following crusades, Christian armies were never able to retake Jerusalem, and ended up losing land they had gained in their early successes. In the Fourth Crusade, knights loyal to the pope even captured and looted Christian Constantinople, the Byzantine capital.

## The Impact of the Crusades

The immediate effect of the crusades was a bitter legacy of religious hatred. Apart from fighting between Christians and Muslims, Jewish communities were also attacked during the Crusades. However, there were also far reaching effects on European economic, political, and social life as well.

Economic	Political	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in trade</li> <li>• Growth of money economy</li> <li>• Decline in serfdom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase power of monarchs and papacy</li> <li>• Increased division between Byzantine Empire and Western Christianity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanded European views of the world</li> <li>• Increase in exploration</li> </ul>





# Conflict in the Church

In the Middle Ages many conflicts began erupting between the Church and monarchs as they fought for land, power, wealth, and the loyalty of their people. The longest and most destructive struggle pitted popes against the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, who ruled vast lands from Germany to Italy.

## The Holy Roman Empire

Starting in the 900s, German kings were rewarded for their service to the pope by being crowned **Holy Roman emperor** - "holy" because they were crowned by the pope, and "Roman" because they saw themselves as heirs to the emperors of ancient Rome. However, the pope still declared **papal supremacy**, or authority over all secular rulers. In 1054 Holy Roman emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII came into conflict over this issue. Gregory wanted to make the Church independent of secular rulers, so he banned the practice of **lay investiture**. Under this practice, the king was allowed to appoint bishops to office. The pope believed this was his right only. When Henry resisted, the pope excommunicated him and supported rebellious German nobles. The struggle over investiture lasted for almost 50 years, until 1122 when both sides accepted a treaty known as the **Concordat of Worms**.



During the 1100s and 1200s, ambitious German emperors sought to control Italy. This often resulted in conflict with popes and the wealthy cities of northern Italy. The Holy Roman emperor Frederick I, called **Frederick Barbarossa**, attempted to take over the northern Italian cities, but was defeated by the northern armies and the pope's forces. The involvement of Germany in Italian affairs resulted in German nobles growing more independent. Unlike France and England, Germany would not centralize power and become a nation-state for another 600 years.

In the 1200s, the Church reached the peak of its political power. In 1198, the powerful Pope Innocent III became head of the church. He claimed supremacy over all other rulers, and was able to bend the kings of Europe to his will by ordering his bishops to not bestow sacraments upon any nation that disobeyed him. Pope Innocent also launched crusades, or holy wars, against religious groups in Europe that did not follow the Catholic doctrine.

## Schism in the Church

In 1309, Pope Clement V had moved the papal court to Avignon outside the border of southern France. It remained there for about 70 years under French domination. In Avignon, popes reigned over a lavish court. Critics grew angry at the office of the pope, and reformers worked for change. In 1378, reformers elected their own pope to rule from Rome. For decades, there was a **schism**, or split, in the Church. During this schism, two or even three popes all claimed to be the true voice of God on earth. A church council finally ended the crisis in 1417 by removing authority from all three popes and electing a new candidate, but the power of the church was severely weakened. The spectacle of Popes fighting for power and denouncing one another resulted in a loss of prestige for the highest office in the Catholic Church.

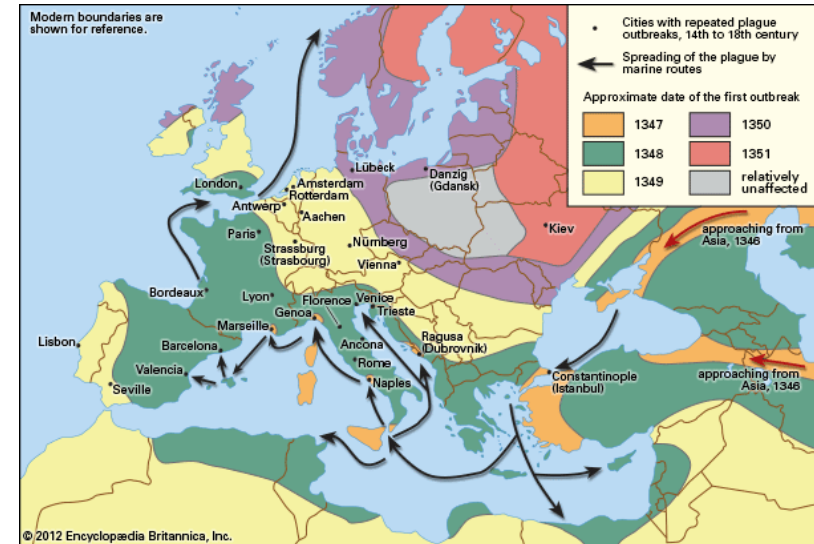


# The Black Death

Starting in 1347, a disease that Europeans called the Black Death was raging through Italy. Soon afterward it spread to the rest of Europe. Between 1347 and 1353 the plague killed one third of the population of Europe – more than 25 million people.

## Spread of the Bubonic Plague

The Black Death was really the **bubonic plague**, a disease spread by fleas carried by rats. In the 1200s, Mongol armies conquered much of Asia, probably setting off a new **epidemic**, or outbreak of rapid-spreading disease. The epidemic probably originated in China in the early 1300s, where rats spread the plague in crowded Chinese cities. Fleas jumped from those rats to infest the clothes and packs of traders heading west. As a result, the disease quickly spread from Asia to the Middle East and then to Europe. Flea covered rats thrived in filthy medieval cities, where houses were close together, and residents threw garbage and human waste into the streets.



The plague followed trade routes from Asia to Europe and then spread across the continent. Outbreaks of the plague continued for centuries. To ward off infections, this doctor from the 1600s wears a mask with a long beak filled with herbs and spices.

## The Economy Suffers

The plague had a disastrous effect on the European economy. The death of workers and employers caused a **labor shortage** and production to decline. As the cost of labor soared, inflation occurred too. Villagers forced off the land looked for work in towns. Revolts erupted around Europe, as peasants struggled to find work and artisans fought for more power. Eventually, this led to the breakdown of feudalism, as well.

## Breakdown of European Society

The plague brought terror and confusion, as no one knew what had caused the disease or how to stop it. Many people saw the plague as God's punishment for their sins. Some Christians blamed Jews for the plague, believing they had poisoned wells to cause the disease. As a result, thousands of Jews were slaughtered. Normal life broke down as people fled cities or hid in their homes to avoid contracting the disease.