

Medieval Europe

The Rise of Medieval Europe

Medieval Europe

After the fall of Rome, Western Europe was backward, going through a period known as the Dark Ages. This period was a transition between ancient and modern times, and a dynamic and competitive civilization rose.

The Franks

A pagan group of people, known as the Franks, settled in what is now France and Western Germany. These people emerged as the strongest Germanic group.

Charlemagne

Charlemagne, also known as Charles the Great, nearly doubled the borders of the Frankish kingdom, restored literacy, and made his court a center for research. He was crowned as the first Holy Roman Emperor, and this cemented the relationship between popes and kings. He also relied on counts to help him rule. Counts solved local problems, settled disputes, and raised armies.

Vikings

Vikings were warriors that were merciless and they sought riches and adventure. They were also explorers, settlers, and skilled traders. Vikings settled in Greenland, Iceland, North America, and England. Their ships were long and deckles and could be moved quickly.

Viking raids led to the isolation of European communities and they weakened the authority of monarchs. Trade declined and many areas faced economic collapse. As a result of royal weakness, nobles and local officials took over the local defense. People also began taking refuge in churches.

Feudalism

Feudalism is a decentralized form of government based on kings giving land to nobles in exchange for loyalty and military aid. It developed so that not every member of society had to spend their time farming. Under feudalism, some people worked, some prayed, and some fought.

Fiefs

Fiefs were the building blocks of feudalism, and they were tracts of land given to warriors. Each fief came with peasant workers to cultivate the land.

Manorialism

Manorialism is a system of agricultural production that provided people with food, shelter, and protection as long as they worked on the fief. Peasants were dependent on the land and on the lord they served.

William I

William I became the ruler of England after he won the Battle of Hastings, a battle for the throne of England. He established a Great Council of royal officials, bishops, and nobles to advise him. To figure out how much money he could collect from the populace, he had officials conduct the first census in Europe since Roman times. This all became an entry in the Domesday Book.

Magna Carta

John was a very unpopular English king, so he was forced to sign the Magna Carta. The Magna Carta put limits on royal power and also prevented taxes from being unfairly collected and it gave people the right to a trial by jury.

Church in Medieval Europe

The church was the center of life during the Middle Ages. The church was also a school, hospital, and guest house. People during this time also believed that sacraments, which were formal church rituals, were the only way to receive grace from God.

Parish Priests

Parish priests lived among the people and helped strengthen the medieval church.

Monks and Nuns

Monks and nuns lived apart from society, but they were not completely isolated. They preserved religious works and copied texts. Monasteries and convents were also schools, hospitals, food distribution centers, and guest houses.

Influence of Lords

Bishops and abbots received land from kings because they came from noble families. Since they were religious leaders, however, they could not fight. They gave some of their land to knights who would fight for them. The feudal ties boosted the Church's power. Lords began to have control over the Church because they gave money. Also, they appointed their own families instead of the most qualified individuals. Church officials became careless and didn't care as much about the religion or the Church.

Cardinals

Cardinals are high Church officials that are directly below the pope. The cardinals began to choose the pope instead of political leaders.

Franciscans

Franciscan friars followed the simple life of Jesus and they became known for their cheerful trust in God and their respect for nature as a divine gift.

Wars of Medieval Europe

Hundred Years' War

The Hundred Years' War was caused by the fight for land between the English and the French monarchs. Despite the English winning the early battles due to their use of the longbow, a weapon that could pierce the armor of their enemies quickly and from a great distance, the French were victorious. The English still did win important battles, however, including the battles of Crecy and Agincourt.

Joan of Arc was a teenage girl who heard messages from God that told her to fight in the war against the English. This prompted her to go to Charles, the heir to the throne, and ask for an army. Eventually, he agreed and she reclaimed Orleans for France in only ten days. This earned her the nickname "the Maid of Orleans". She did not survive the war, however. She was eventually captured by the English, abandoned by the French, and burned at the stake.

War of the Roses

The War of the Roses was between the York (white rose) and the Lancaster (red rose) families. Both families wanted to rule England, so a war broke out because there was no actual heir. Henry VII, from the Lancaster family, eventually took the throne and married Elizabeth of York, effectively uniting the families and starting the Tudor dynasty.

The Crusades

The Crusades were expeditions by the Christians whose purpose were to recover the Holy Lands from the Seljuk Turks (Muslims).

Pope Urban called for the First Crusade, claiming that the Turks were "raping, destroying, cutting off routes", etc., but he had lied. This crusade was successful.

The Second Crusade was very unsuccessful and the French and German rulers quarreled constantly.

The Third Crusade was called for after a powerful Muslim leader named Saladin captured Jerusalem. This crusade involved Germany, France, and England. This crusade was not successful.

There were many other crusades, but none of them were very successful.

The crusades helped break down feudalism and increase the authority of kings, brought back texts and knowledge, trading increased, and crusaders learned how to make better maps.

Changes in Medieval Europe

The Decline of Feudalism

Feudalism begins to decline when the crusades are called for (*see Wars in Europe*). Europe gets new technology, items, and ideas because of cultural diffusion. Banking starts during this time as well, leading to the decline of feudalism.

Changes in Agriculture

Changes in agriculture included a new, heavier plow, collar harnesses instead of ox yokes, and three-field planting systems. More land could be plowed faster, and people began migrating and clearing more land.

Changes in Trade

The revival of towns caused an expansion of trade, along with the rebuilt and expanded Roman road system. Trade fairs also offered many items for people to buy. The largest trade fair was held in Champagne.

Money Systems

The rise of a money economy led to banking, which allowed serfs to buy their freedom, thus helping decline feudalism. The first bankers were mainly Italians and Jews.

Guilds

Guilds were organized business associations for merchants and artisans, and their purpose was to maintain a monopoly of the local market. Masters were artisans with their own shops run by less-skilled artisans called apprentices. Apprentices became journeymen after a while, and then they eventually became masters themselves.

Scholasticism

Scholasticism was a system of thought where Aristotle's philosophy was used to support Christian ideas.

Vernacular

Most medieval literature was written in vernacular, or the language of everyday speech. Vernacular languages gave each kingdom a separate identity as well.

Great Schism

The church found itself with two popes, and this controversy was called the Great Schism. It seriously undermined the authority of the pope as well. A church council elected a third pope, but soon all three were forced to resign.