

CHAPTER SIX: CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES IN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

While Islam was spreading rapidly in regions from Spain to India, the older religion of Christianity was growing as well, with footholds in areas that overlapped with Islam. Just as Islam became the dominant religion in the lands controlled by the caliphates, Christianity came to dominate many of the areas formerly controlled by the Roman Empire. Whereas Islam successfully united its lands politically until the 9th century, no such political unification characterized the Christian lands. Instead, a patchwork of tribal kingdoms emerged in western Europe, and the Byzantine Empire rose in the lands around the eastern Mediterranean Sea. However, in this age when societies were unified by belief systems, Christianity, like Islam, provided order and organization that political leaders did not offer. By the end of the era (1450), the Byzantine Empire was on the verge of collapse under pressure from Turkish invasions, and Western Europe, though still politically divided, had laid the foundation for the central place it would occupy on the world stage for the next 500 years.

WESTERN EUROPE: AFTER THE FALL OF ROME

Historians refer to the period of western European history from 500 to 1500 C.E. as the “**Middle Ages**”, or **medieval times**. The term “middle” means that the period falls in between two others, preceded by the Roman Empire and followed by the European Renaissance. Another way of referring to the time is “The Dark Ages,” which implies that the periods on either end are “light.” Indeed, the metaphor is not inappropriate if you take the view that civilization is superior to simpler forms of life, such as hunting and gathering, pastoral nomadism, or simple subsistence farming (see discussion on pages 36-37). The characteristics of civilization (generation of reliable surpluses, specialized occupations, clear social class distinctions, cities, complex governments, long distance trade, and organized writing systems) were securely in place for the area during Roman times and the Renaissance. During the Middle Ages civilization was clearly suspended. However, the period is more complex than that. It is helpful to divide the era in two:

- 1) **The Early Middle Ages (500-1000 C.E.)** – During this era the Germanic tribes that had invaded the Roman Empire settled into various parts of Europe. Most of the inhabitants of their kingdoms were pastoral nomads or subsistence farmers, and their political leaders were tribal chieftains. Very few people could read and write, little long-distance trade took place, and settlements were mainly villages and small towns.
- 2) **The High Middle Ages (1000-1500 C.E.)** – About midway through the Middle Ages, signs of recovery began, accelerating especially after about 1200. Towns grew, small cities emerged, trade with other areas of the Eastern Hemisphere was established, and the social class system grew more complex with the emergence of a middle class. By the end of the era, the European Renaissance was well entrenched in Italy and was spreading into northern Europe.

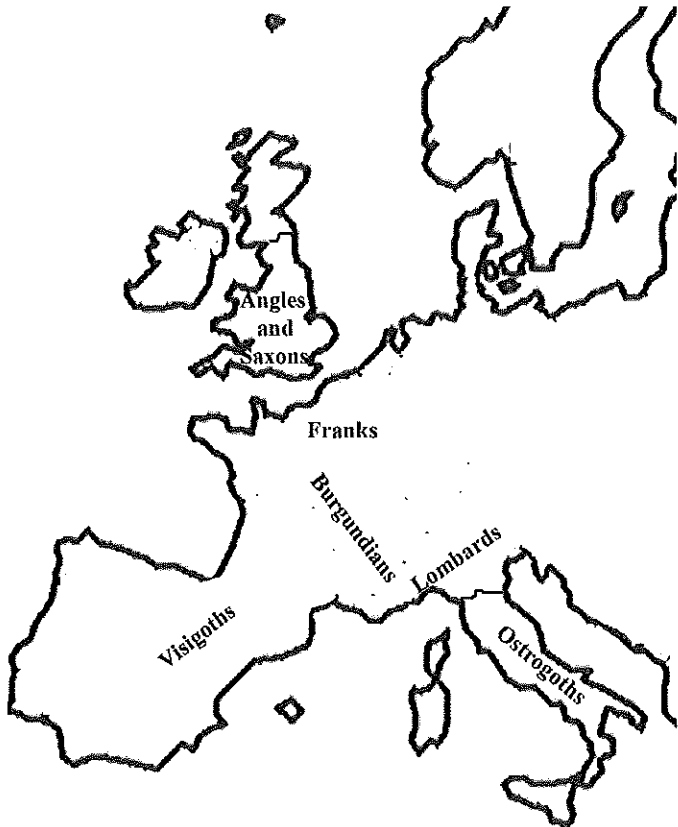
The Early Middle Ages

When the Western Roman Empire fell, western Europe was left in the chaos that resulted from the collapse of the political, social, and military order formerly imposed by Rome. Continuing invasions and conflicts among the invaders left the successor states in jeopardy, and in this uncertain environment they sought and gradually built a new political and economic order. New infrastructures were built within the framework of the Christian church based in Rome, which provided a cultural unity throughout western Europe despite the lack of political centralization. Although Christianity had come too late to provide the necessary cultural glue to hold the Roman Empire together, it served that purpose during the Early Middle Ages in Europe, enabling the area to regain economic, political, social, and military organization that had been lost when Rome fell.

Political Development

In the last years of the Western Roman Empire, the Roman provinces were dismantled by the Germanic tribes, and the borders of their kingdoms changed constantly with the fortunes of war. The Roman governors were replaced by tribal chieftains, but more importantly, the Roman concept of rule by law was replaced by informal governments based on family ties and personal loyalty. The Germanic people did not identify with a state, or even a kingdom, but with an extended family that followed a particular leader. Warriors were bound to their chief through oaths of loyalty, and in return the chief gave them food, shelter, and weapons. The kingdoms were loose configurations of many such loyalty patterns that allowed little opportunity for centralized government to form.

Economically, people settled on manors, or large estates operated by leaders who provided protection for others, in exchange for free labor. Eventually, the peasants lost land claims to the “lords,” so that the groundwork was laid for the development of **feudalism**, a complex system of political and military loyalties that linked lords together, and **manorialism**, an economic system in which peasants were tied to the land to supply labor to their lords.



Early Medieval Europe. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Germanic tribes that had invaded the empire settled into different parts of western Europe and formed their own kingdoms. The map above shows the major kingdoms that were in place by the beginning of this period (600 C.E.) The borders of the kingdoms changed frequently as the groups invaded one another's territory, and many other smaller groups were involved in the fighting.

For a brief time in the late 8th and early 9th centuries, it looked as if one group – the **Franks** – would unite all of western Europe under one king. Even though they eventually failed, their imprint for political and economic organization was left on the entire area. The Franks managed to organize a series of Germanic kingdoms under their kings mainly through military conquest, starting with

Clovis, who was their ruler from 481 until 511. Clovis and his supporters first destroyed the last vestiges of Roman power, then imposed control over other Franks, and finally organized campaigns against neighboring Germanic peoples. By the time of his death, the Franks clearly had formed the most powerful kingdom in western Europe. Significantly, Clovis converted to Christianity, which won support for him from other Christians as well as the pope in Rome.



PERSPECTIVES: WILLIAM MANCHESTER ON THE DARK AGES

Many explanations have been given for why historians have dubbed the era from about 500 to 1000 in Europe as the “Dark Ages.” Most of them center on the notion of lost civilization that was eventually regained at the end of the period. One controversial interpretation may be found in *A World Lit Only by Fire*, by historian William Manchester, who describes a time that was indeed dark:

“The Dark Ages were stark in every dimension. Famines and plague, culminating in the Black Death and its recurring pandemics, repeatedly thinned the population...It says much about the Middle Ages that in the year 1500, after a thousand years of neglect, the roads built by the Romans were still the best on the continent...Among the lost arts was bricklaying; in all of Germany, England, Holland, and Scandinavia, virtually no stone buildings, except cathedrals, were raised for ten centuries... Surrounding them was the vast, menacing, and at places, impassable Hercynian Forest, infested by boars; by bears; by the hulking medieval wolves who lurk so fearsomely in fairy tales handed down from that time; by imaginary demons; and by very real outlaws, who flourished because they were seldom pursued..Although homicides were twice as frequent as deaths by accident...only one of every hundred murderers was ever brought to justice...”

Reference: A World Lit Only by Fire, by William Manchester. Boston: Little, Brown, 1993, pp. 5-6.

Clovis’ descendants lost control of the Frankish realm to Charles Martel (“Charles the Hammer”) of the **Carolingian family**, whose grandson, **Charlemagne** (“Charles the Great”), conquered most of mainland western Europe, temporarily unifying it. He ruled for half a century, and as long as he was alive, his growing kingdom paid him allegiance. One important factor in explaining the rising power of the Carolingians was the need for protection from the wave

of attacks on Europe from the **Vikings**, raiders from Scandinavia, that began in 793 and continued for the next two centuries. Charlemagne kept control through military prowess, but he also insured the loyalty of those conquered by setting up an administrative system divided into counties. Each county was governed in the king's name by a powerful landholder called a count. The counts administered justice and raised armies, and Charlemagne wisely placed checks on their power by sending out royal agents called **missi dominici** (the sovereign's envoys) as the "eyes and ears" of the king to report back on any abuses of power. Charlemagne himself constantly moved around his kingdom in order to make his presence felt. In 800 the pope crowned Charlemagne "emperor," implying that he was heir to the Roman throne. Of equal importance is that the act symbolized the superior authority of the church over political leaders, even though in reality Charlemagne needed no such endorsement to maintain his empire. This distinction between religious and political leaders would lead to clashes between popes and kings throughout the Middle Ages in Europe.

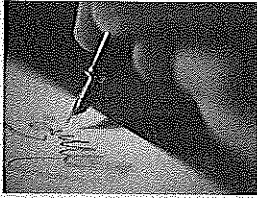
After Charlemagne's death, his empire fell apart under his less talented heirs. His son, Louis the Pious, divided the empire among his three sons, who fought among themselves for supremacy. Their disputes were settled by the Treaty of Verdun, which divided western Europe along general linguistic and cultural borders which still exist today. Had Charlemagne's successors kept his empire together, the course of European history would almost certainly be quite different. Instead, Europe fragmented into smaller political units that would compete and quarrel with one another for centuries.

The model for political organization set in place by the Franks is a version of **feudalism** based on loyalties among the elite: lords, vassals, and overlords. Partly because the origins of the system were local and informal, the web of connections was incredibly complex. For example, a lord may have controlled his vassals (those that owe loyalty to him), but he in turn was a vassal to an overlord, who in turn was a vassal to a king. The authority of the king was based on these ties, which could come to cross-purposes with loyalties owed to a rival. These often contradictory loyalty ties led to conflict characterized by heavily armed knights in combat to fulfill their loyalty obligations. The European version of feudalism allowed knights (vassals) to own land usually granted to them by their lords, so they were not just a fighting force, but were also a part of the overlapping hierarchies among elites.

Economic Development

The economic system that evolved in western Europe during early medieval times was **manorialism**, which defined both economic and political obligations between lords and peasant laborers. Most people were **serfs** who lived on and

were tied to self-sufficient agricultural estates (manors). Serfs received protection, administrative justice, and the right to graze their animals from the lord



ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS: *CAPITULARY ON THE MISSI*

One way that Charlemagne kept order in his kingdom was by sending *missi dominici* (the sovereign's officials) to oversee the work done by the counts, or the regional administrators. In 802 Charlemagne issued the *Capitulary on the Missi*, a document that established regulations for the *missi* to enforce. The *Capitulary* was written by Charlemagne's secretaries in his name, since he was unable to read or write. The following excerpts reflect some of Charlemagne's concerns about his empire as well as an attempt to reestablish the rule of law:

- “5. That no one shall presume to rob...the churches of God, or widows, or orphans, or pilgrims, for the lord emperor himself...has constituted himself their protector and defender...”
- 7. That no one shall presume to neglect a summons to war from the lord emperor; and that no one of the Counts shall be so presumptuous as to dare to excuse any one of those who owe military service...
- 8. ...no one shall dare to neglect to pay his dues or tax.
- 28. ...That the counts...shall provide most carefully, as they desire the goodwill of the emperor, for the *missi* who are sent out...
- 32. Murders, by which a multitude of the Christian people perish, we command in every way to be shunned and to be forbidden...”

Source: *University of Pennsylvania Translations and Reprints*. D. C. Munro, trans. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1900, vol. 6 no.5, pp. 16-27.

of the manor, and in return they were obliged to give a portion of their products to the lord and to stay on the land. The manorial system originated in the later Roman Empire, but it strengthened during early medieval days once trade declined and Roman political protection disappeared. As a result of these developments, the manors became self-sufficient. In the early Middle Ages, trade was based on **barter**, or the exchange of goods directly. Because manors were self-sustaining, trade with outsiders was limited, and money wasn't necessary. At first, the serfs' labor was difficult as they tried to use wooden plows for the heavy soils of France and Germany, but during the 9th century a better plow with an iron plate, the moldboard, made the work a little easier. Another

9th-century development was a new three-fields system, which improved productivity through a rotation of crops that involved leaving one third of the fields unplanted each year. Serfs were not slaves. They were not bought and sold, and they had ownership rights to their houses and lands as long as they honored their obligations to the lord.

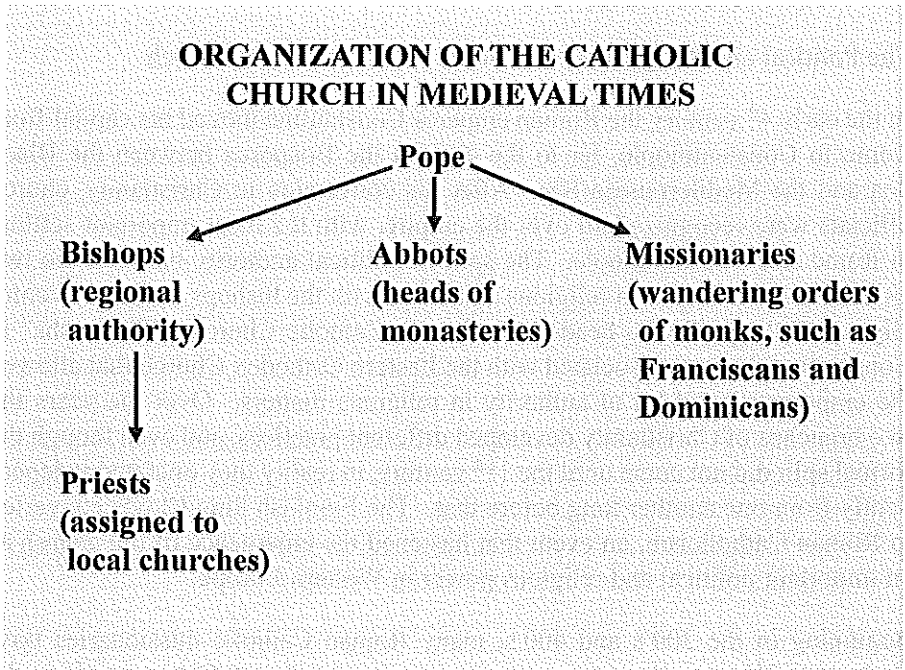
The Political and Religious Power of the Roman Catholic Church

In the early 4th century the Roman emperor Constantine moved his capital from Rome to Constantinople, far to the east on the Bosphorus between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. After his conversion to Christianity, church officials were recognized all over the empire, with the most important settling in Rome and Constantinople. The split in political authority between the two cities also led to a split in religious authority, with the bishops in Rome eventually called “popes” who headed the Roman Catholic Church. “Patriarchs” in Constantinople were associated with the Eastern Orthodox Church that allowed the emperor a good bit of authority in religious matters. Over the years the two branches of Christianity developed different practices, and even though the formal split did not come until the 11th century, in reality they operated independently from one another long before that. The Frankish king Clovis converted to Roman Catholicism, an event that hastened the emergence of the church as an important political and religious power in Western Europe.

Beginning in the 300’s and 400’s, many Roman Catholic missionaries traveled across Western Europe, converting the Germanic and Celtic people to the religion. One of the most famous was St. Patrick, who established Christian churches throughout Ireland. The conversion of Clovis was particularly important because many Germanic groups had chosen a branch of Christianity called Arianism. Catholic Christians considers the Arians heretics, so Clovis’s conversion marked a partnership between Frankish kings and the Catholic Church. The church developed a hierarchical organization that gave structure to the politically fragmented groups across Western Europe, and church officials soon gained political as well as religious power.

Bishops generally directed churches in urban areas, but since Roman cities dwindled in size, the church supported monasteries in rural areas. Here Christian men and women gave up their private possessions to live simply and devote their lives to the church. Like the local priests, monks and nuns were expected to be poor, chaste, and obedient. Rules for their behavior were written by Benedict around 540, and included daily rituals of prayer, manual labor, and simple eating. **The Benedictine Rule** came to be followed by almost all Italian, English, and Frankish monks and nuns. The monasteries played an important role in providing stability during the Dark Ages. They protected refugees, operated schools, maintained libraries, and copied books. Many books had been

destroyed as Rome was attacked by the Germanic tribes, but some of those that survived did so because monk-scholars carefully copied the manuscripts, saving at least a portion of the intellectual heritage of the classical civilizations.



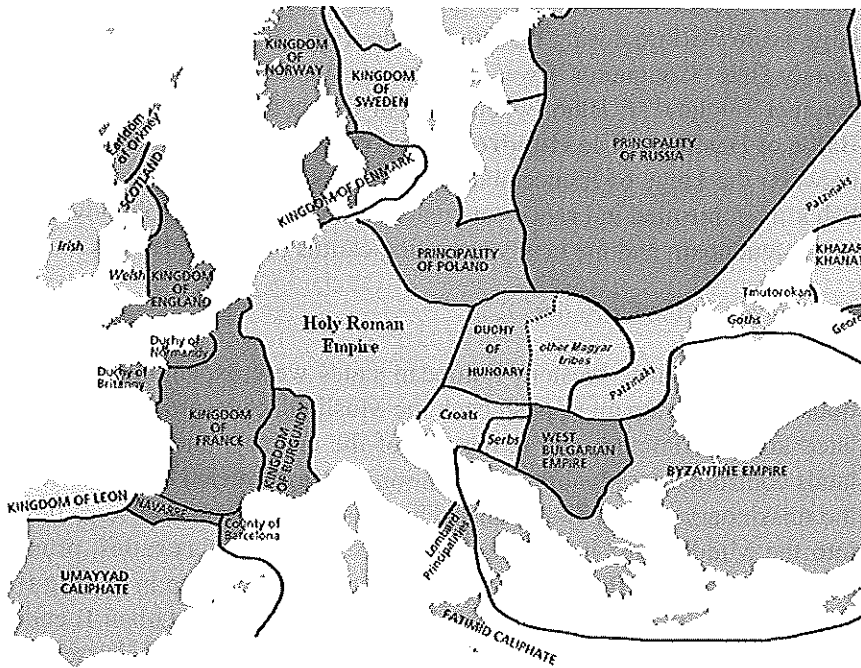
The Catholic Church provided organizational “glue” for western Europe during medieval times by ensuring that its presence was felt in many ways. The pope gained authority as the head of a hierarchy that included regional and local churches, monasteries, and missionary orders. Other high officials included cardinals who appointed popes from their ranks and archbishops who supervised the bishops.

The Revival of Civilization: The High Middle Ages

By 1000 C.E. Western Europe was showing some signs of waking from its years of self-sufficiency and isolation. Gradually, agricultural techniques and technologies from eastern Europe and Asia were making some difference, particularly the moldboard plow, the three-field system, and a new horse collar that allowed horses to pull plows without choking. The use of the stirrup in warfare spread from central Asia, and better agricultural methods were promoted by the monasteries. During the 10th century, Viking raids became less serious as regional governments grew stronger and Vikings settled into European communities to intermarry with the natives. As agricultural production increased, so did the population, creating a demand for more trade, which in turn caused towns to grow. As local economies grew, political and cultural changes occurred as well.

Political Developments

By its very nature, feudalism discouraged the growth of strong central governments. The political power of the Catholic Church also countered the power of the kings. The church not only established moral boundaries for its members, but it also set **canon law**, or rules for behavior that first filled the void of political authority in the early days, but eventually meant that political authority could not develop. For example, the church had the power to **excommunicate** its members, or separate them from the church and its sacraments. Even more powerful was the **interdict**, which excommunicated all people within a ruler's realm. In this Age of Faith, that meant that all babies born could not be baptized, no marriages would be valid in the eyes of the church, and no last rites could be read to those on their deathbeds. If a ruler misbehaved, the church could put his region under an interdict in order to pressure the ruler to submit to the will of the church. As political leaders grew stronger, friction grew between kings and popes – a dynamic that worked against the development of centralized political power. Another limitation to the growth of strong central government was resistance by the nobility, who enjoyed the independence that feudalism and manorialism afforded them.



Europe about 1000 C.E. By 1000 the map of Europe shows kingdoms, principalities, duchies, and empires that form the basis for modern European countries. However, feudalism decentralized power, so that local aristocrats and church leaders also had a great deal of political power.

Because of these limitations, many areas of Europe remained feudalistic long past 1450, including the **Holy Roman Empire**, established in spirit with Charlemagne's crowning in 800, but not officially until 962, when a loose confederation of German princes named one of their own as emperor. The emperor was crowned by the pope, implying that power rested in the hands of the pope, and the princes always asserted their independence and never paid too much attention to the emperor. In most areas of eastern Europe feudalism also remained in place for many years, partly because trade and commerce grew more rapidly in the west. In England, France, Spain, and other kingdoms in the west, the power of monarchs grew into centralized governments by 1450, although not without many challenges along the way. For example, our modern concept of **limited government** (limits on the power of the ruler) is based partly on the **Magna Carta**, a document that nobles forced King John of England to sign that guaranteed rights to the nobility. Late in the 13th century, **parliaments** were created to give nobility and the clergy a voice in policymaking. Although competition for political control remained a contest among the elite (clergy, nobles, and political leaders), these struggles created the cradle that fostered the eventual growth of modern democracies.

Stronger monarchs were able to gather larger armies, so one result was some large-scale warfare during the late Middle Ages. For example, William of Normandy (the "Conqueror") was able to command a large army to invade and conquer England in 1066, when English forces clashed with Normans at the Battle of Hastings. The **Hundred Years War** during the 14th and 15th centuries between the kings of France and England was fought over territories the English king controlled in France – a great conflict between the old governing rules under feudalism and the newly emerging claims of national states.

The Impact of the Crusades

By the 11th century, Western European states were expanding in many directions: south into Spain to push back the Muslims, eastward into sparsely populated areas of Poland; and at the end of the century, into the Middle Eastern lands controlled by Muslims. Population increases fueled the expansion, as did the missionary zeal of Christians. The most dramatic moves were those made into the Middle East in a series of attacks called the **Crusades**, prompted by a request from the Byzantine emperor, Alexius I, for help in raising troops to resist Turkish incursions into his territory. In 1095 Pope Urban II called upon Christian knights to save the holy city of Jerusalem from "an accursed race" [the Turks] by undertaking a journey "for the remission of your sins, and be assured of the reward of imperishable glory in the Kingdom of Heaven." The response was immediately overwhelming, with the crowds responding, "God wills it! God wills it!" In 1096 between 50,000 and 60,000 knights from western Europe joined the Crusades, beginning a series of attacks that lasted for two centuries.

The First Crusade managed to win Jerusalem from the Turkish armies and establish a number of forts in the area around it. Although the Crusaders held Jerusalem for close to a century, the Turks reorganized under the great Muslim



PERSPECTIVES: MOTIVATIONS FOR THE CRUSADES

The Christian Crusades were phenomenal events in which thousands of European knights left their homes - with full knowledge that they probably would never return - in order to fight for a cause. This mass movement of people from one area to another is unusual enough that a good historian should ask, "How did it happen?" and "Why did they go?"

From the pope's perspective: By the late 11th century, Byzantine and Roman Christians had gone their separate ways for some time, with the pope claiming to be the supreme head of the Church, and the Byzantine emperor denying the claim. Pope Urban II almost certainly hoped that a successful Crusade would convince the Byzantine emperor to change his mind. Besides, from the pope's point of view, it was better to have the knights fighting the Turks than one another.

From the knights' perspectives: The First Crusade was undoubtedly fueled by religious fervor, especially since the pope promised forgiveness of sins for any man that died in the Crusades. For other knights, the Crusades were a chance to win glory in battle. Especially in the later Crusades, plunder was a motivation, because the lands of the Middle East were far richer than those in western Europe.

general, **Saladin**, who took it back during the 12th century. The Crusaders never succeeded in recapturing Jerusalem, and Venice turned the Fourth Crusade during the early 13th century into an attack on its commercial rivals in Constantinople. Ultimately, the Crusaders failed to accomplish their goals.

The failure of the Crusades does not alter their importance in shaping the course of history during the era from 600 to 1450. More than any other single factor, the Crusades laid the foundation for the emergence of European countries in the next era as powerful forces on their way to eventually controlling most other areas of the world. Why? Most importantly, it put them in direct contact with the oldest areas of world civilizations and made them aware of worlds they never

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knew existed. Those that returned brought back with them material evidence of civilization: fine silks, beautiful porcelains, exquisite carpets, perfumes, spices, and preservatives. No longer would Europeans be content to remain in their isolated, drafty castles; they had tasted the pleasures of civilization, and change was inevitable.

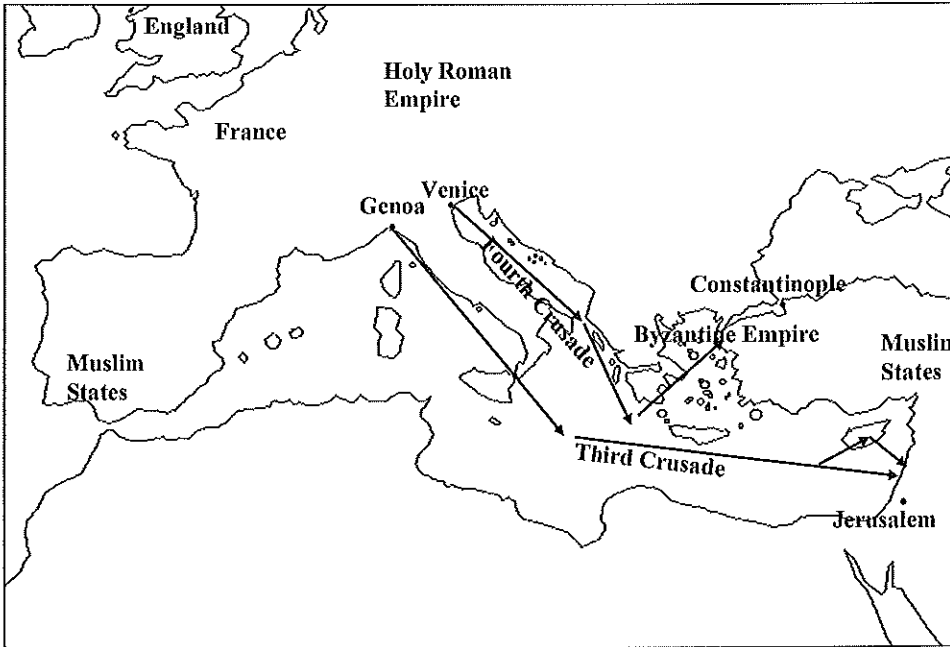
Economic Developments

Two cities that directly benefitted from the Crusades were Venice and Genoa in Italy. Because they were so close to the heart of the old Roman Empire, the cities of Italy never quite succumbed to the feudalistic patterns in the rest of Europe. Instead each city maintained control over the countryside around it and continued to serve as a trade center. When the Crusades began, Venice and Genoa promoted a sea route for the knights to travel to the Holy Lands, disembarking from one of the cities and arriving on the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. Since most European knights had little money, they often offered their services to protect the ships from pirates and internal disputes in exchange for their passage. The ships carried goods both ways across the sea, bringing woolen and cotton textiles and French wines from Europe, and delivering luxury goods from the Middle East to Europe. By the time of the Fourth Crusade in the early 13th century, both cities were wealthy enough to rival older trade cities such as Constantinople.

With the growth of Genoa and Venice, Italian business people introduced banking to the West to facilitate the long-distance exchange of money and goods. Towns in France, the Holy Roman Empire, and England grew in response to the trade, and the use of money spread steadily. Wealthy merchants invested in trading ships and the goods they carried, hoping to make a profit. Internal trade grew as well, with towns exchanging timber and grain from the north for cloth and metal products in the south. Cities in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia formed the **Hanseatic League** to facilitate trade as more towns purchased charters from kings and severed their feudal ties to lords on the rural manors. The towns became a strong source of revenue for kings, who were able to use the money to build armies and gain power over the aristocrats. The craftsmen in the towns formed merchant **guilds**, associations of people who worked in the same occupation. These groups grew powerful enough to control trade, but they also were responsible for training apprentices and setting standards for membership that encouraged the quality of their products to increase.

The growing towns and cities were home to the rising merchant class, who often allied with kings as a counterbalance to the landed aristocracy. Although the manorial system still existed in rural areas, more people were living in towns, and the social class structure grew complex as former serfs became craftsmen,

traders, and merchants. The new urban classes often clashed with the landed nobility, sometimes in open warfare, and by the early 1300s, traders had achieved an independent political status, protected by their own warriors as well as their



Venice and Genoa. Two Italian trading cities became wealthy through new contacts established by the Crusades. During the Third Crusade, knights disembarked from Genoa and headed toward Jerusalem. By the time of the Fourth Crusade, Venice influenced Crusaders to attack Constantinople, even though the Crusades originally began as an effort to help Constantinople. With the sacking of the city, Venice profited by securing trade routes to the Middle East.

wealth. The growth of trade and banking in the late Middle Ages formed the basic building blocks for western capitalism, especially as merchants invested in trading ventures hoping to make a profit, but taking the risk of losing everything if the ship sank or was looted by pirates. Because the Catholic Church took an official stand against **usury** (the charging of interest for the use of money), bankers were often Jews, the descendants of those who had fled Israel during the earlier diasporas (see p.115). The Church eventually eased its policies and allowed Christians to participate more fully in the new capitalism. The Church had promoted the commercial and naval growth of Venice, and church officials sought the patronage of the rising merchant classes. By the 13th century, the Church itself had become a great property holder, as well as a lender of money.

European Christians demonstrated their religious fervor not just by driving back the “infidels” (Muslims) from Jerusalem, but also through their treatment of Jews, who often lived completely segregated from the Christian majority in

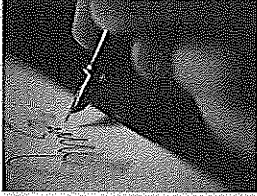
small urban areas called **ghettos**. Other forms of discrimination against Jews included restrictions on owning land or entering craft guilds, so banking and trading were some of the only occupations open to them. Until the 13th century, Jews were seldom attacked, but in that century, English and French kings denounced and expelled them and seized their property. About the same time, **pogroms**, or anti-Semitic mob actions, drove Jews from western to eastern Europe, where they experienced less discrimination.

As medieval social and economic life grew more complex, a familiar pattern became apparent: more restrictions on the lives of women. Germanic customs in early medieval times allowed women considerable freedom, and women were thought to have the gift of prophecy and a special holiness. As in most other agricultural societies, they carried out all household duties with the help of slaves, and their advice was often sought and respected. Strong matrilineal ties existed, and the relationship between a man and his sisters' sons was particularly strong. The Christian emphasis on the equality of all souls, as well as the reverence for Mary, the mother of Jesus, almost certainly gained women more respect than they had in many other societies. They were not as segregated in religious services as were Islamic women, although they could not lead them. Women also had an alternative to married domestic life; monastic life was open to them as well as to men. However, with the growth of cities, women were often excluded from guilds, and their roles in local commerce seem to have decreased during the High Middle Ages. The literature of the day stressed women's roles as subservient to men and praised docile and obedient women as the ideal.

Culture and Arts

Once trade and new businesses created some wealth in western Europe, more specialized occupations grew, allowing cultural developments to follow. As early as the 700s Charlemagne had brought learned men to his court to teach and train others. He opened a school for clergy and government officials headed by Alcuin, an Anglo-Saxon monk of great ability and skills. Although the era is sometimes referred to as the "Carolingian Renaissance," it did not last, and the court collapsed after Charlemagne's death. Shortly after the Crusades began, the first universities were established in Italy, not surprisingly, since Italy was the first area of Europe to directly benefit from the trade sparked by the Crusades. Other universities were founded later in France, England, and Germany. Most of them were created for the clergy, but as early as the 1200s they were combining Christian learning with books of the Greek and Roman Classical age. Since the Muslims in the Middle East had preserved and copied many of these books, once western Europeans came in contact with these areas during the Crusades, Greek and Roman learning made its way back into Europe. Christian teachers, such as Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, and Peter Abelard used arguments

of Aristotle and Socratic methods to teach the truths of Christian faith. A notable intellectual development was **scholasticism**, or the attempt to reconcile the beliefs and values of Christianity with the logical reasoning of Greek philosophy.



ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS: THOMAS AQUINAS ON BUSINESS AND TRADE

By the 13th century, the Catholic Church was modifying its earlier denunciations of business practices, particularly of usury, or the charging of interest. The change in policy is reflected in these passages from *Summa Theologica*, written between 1265 and 1274 by **Thomas Aquinas**, the great medieval theologian:

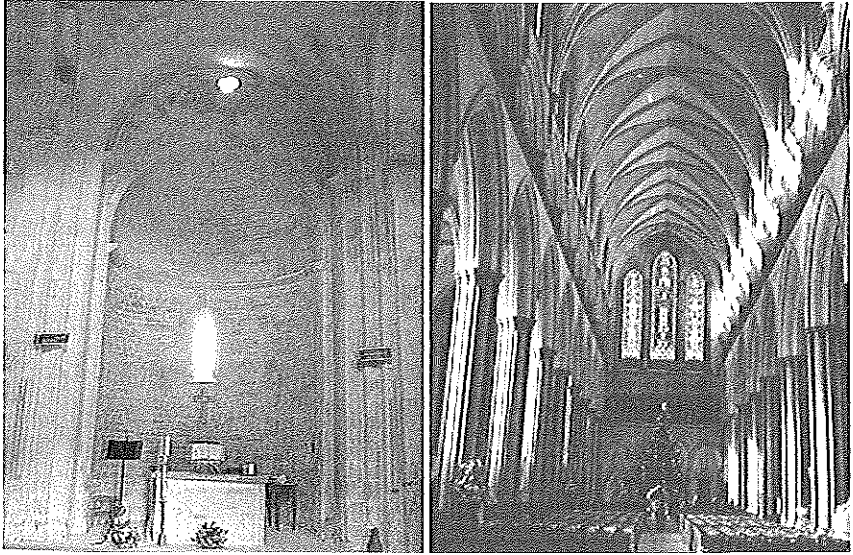
“Buying and selling seem to be established for the common advantage of both parties... The just price of things is not fixed with mathematical precision, but depends on a kind of estimate, so that a slight addition or subtraction would not seem to destroy the equality of justice... Nothing prevents gain from being directed to some necessary or even virtuous end, and thus trading becomes lawful.”

Reference: The Summa Theologica, Thomas Aquinas, in *Basic Writing of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Anton C. Pegis. New York: Random House, 1945.

For example, St. Thomas Aquinas believed that it was possible to prove rationally that God exists by seizing on Aristotle’s argument that a conscious agent had set the world in motion.

An important development in medieval literature was the use of **vernacular languages**, beginning in the 13th century. Before that, all serious literature was generally written in Latin, but starting with Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, written in Italian, the common people’s oral languages (the vernacular) began to replace the old Roman language. Somewhat later came the first important work in English: Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, which provided a great deal of insight into medieval life in England. Other works following in German, French, and Spanish vernaculars, so that by the end of the 14th century, Latin was no longer the preferred written language.

Gothic cathedrals are the most impressive of late medieval art forms, combining architecture, painting, sculpture, inlay, carving, stained glass, music, and literature. A cathedral took many years to construct, and was almost always the most impressive building in town. Particularly after the 13th century, European painting became more sophisticated, demonstrating experimentation with perspective (making a painting look three-dimensional) and portrayal of individual faces.



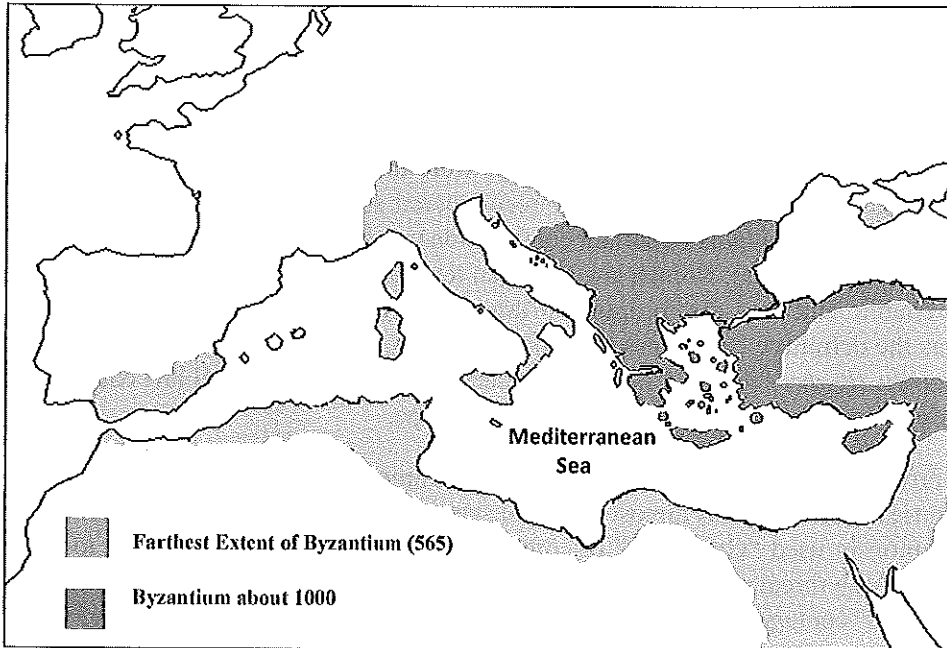
Romanesque and Gothic Architecture. Before the end of the 11th century, Europeans had recovered enough from the fall of Rome to begin to build some impressive churches. The photo on the left is the interior of a Romanesque church in Comps, France. Its simple design and small windows reflect the architectural style of early medieval Europe, borrowed from Roman designs. In contrast, the photo on the right shows the towering Gothic style of the Salisbury Cathedral in England—a later design with large stained glass windows, very high ceilings, and complex vaulting.

Most formal art was produced for the church as an institution or for wealthy clergymen. By the 1300s art and culture were beginning to take shape in Italy as the **Renaissance**, or rebirth, which would spread over Europe and come to full flower during the 15th and 16th centuries.

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

After the Western Roman Empire fell, the Eastern Empire lived on for almost a thousand years, known during most of that time as the **Byzantine Empire**, after “Byzantium,” the town that Constantine renamed “Constantinople” as the capital city. The empire controlled the eastern Mediterranean until the 12th century, the only classical civilization to survive into this era. The Byzantines inherited the Roman line of authority, complete with Roman roads, communications, and functioning imperial institutions. The Empire also became an economic pow-

erhouse, and its manufactured goods were highly desirable, especially its silks, which matched the quality of Chinese products. Its cultural impact was also significant since the Slavic peoples of eastern Europe and Russia were very much influenced by the Byzantines, and many adopted the Eastern Orthodox religion. By the 12th century, the Empire had weakened, with the Islamic states crowding them to the east, Slavic people dominating the lands to the north, and western Europeans gaining strength to their west. However, the empire survived until 1453 when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks who renamed the city Istanbul.



The Byzantine Empire. At its largest, the Byzantine Empire spread from Italy to Anatolia, and included the southern Mediterranean coastline and the southern coast of Spain. Much land was lost, however, and by 1000 the empire only controlled lands in Greece and Anatolia.

Political Developments

Although Germanic invasions threatened the eastern empire as well as the western empire, the east was better fortified because it was wealthier than the west. The major political threat of the early Byzantine Empire was the **Sassanid Empire** to the east. The Sassanids had sought to rebuild the old Persian Empire, but their hopes were dashed when they were attacked and defeated by the Arab Muslims in the 7th century. The precedent for leadership style was set by Constantine, who claimed divine favor and sanction for his rule. In contrast to separation of political and religious powers developing in the west, the emperor often intervened in theological disputes, and used his political position

to define “orthodox” (accepted, true) beliefs and condemn others as **heretical** (false, often considered to be dangerous). This policy of political and religious power concentrated in the emperor’s hands was called **caesaropapism** (caesar and pope). Emperors stood above the law, and their power was enhanced by a bureaucracy so large and complex that today we use the adjective “byzantine” to describe unnecessarily complicated or outdated structures.

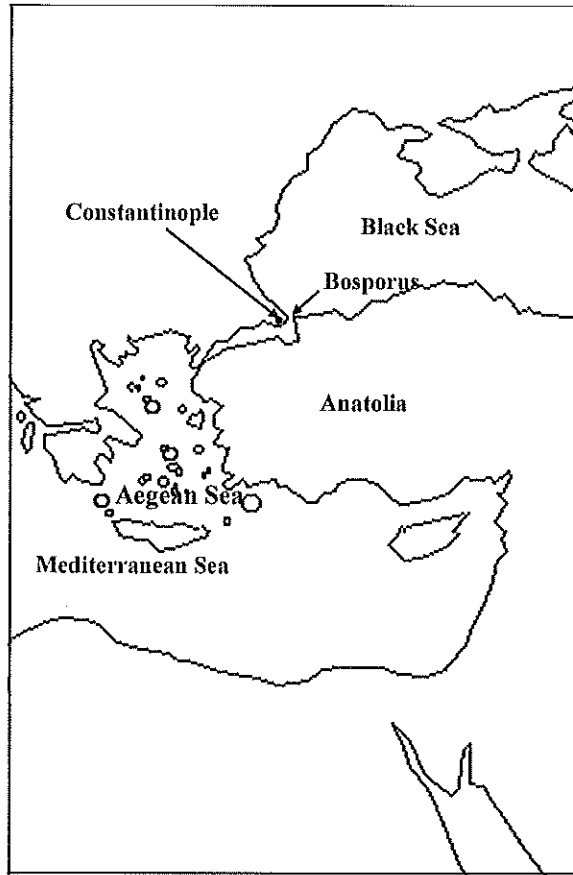
The most important of the early Byzantine emperors was **Justinian**, who ruled from 527 to 565 C.E. Like Constantine, Justinian put a great deal of time, money, and effort into public buildings in Constantinople, most notably the **Hagia Sophia**, or Church of Holy Wisdom, that still stands today as one of the most important examples of Christian architecture in the world. Justinian also embarked on a major military campaign to win back the lost lands of the Roman Empire, and he made significant progress toward that goal, reclaiming lands in northern Africa and Spain. His efforts were ultimately a failure, since within two generations almost all of the reconquered areas had fallen to new invaders. Justinian’s most important contribution was his codification of Roman law. Over the centuries, Roman law had been revised and systemized, first under the republic and then during imperial times, but Justinian’s work is usually seen as the definitive codification of Roman law. It is preserved in his *corpus iuris civilis* (*Body of the Civil Law*), and it served as the basis for civil law codes that developed throughout much of western Europe.

From the early 600s the empire was under almost constant attack for two centuries. The Muslims almost took Constantinople in 717, when the Byzantines famously used “Greek fire” (a combustible liquid) to drive them back to sea. The Arab threat continued, and the Turks seriously pressured the empire during the 11th century, resulting in the call for help to the Catholic pope in the west in 1095. Meanwhile, Slavic kingdoms, especially Bulgaria to the north, had to be held back from their incursions into Byzantine territory. In the 19th century a Bulgarian king took the title of “tsar”, Slavic for Caesar, reflecting his ambitions. The Bulgarian army was defeated soundly in 1014, and Bulgaria became part of the empire. All in all, the Byzantines showed a remarkable ability to survive despite the continuing threats to their power.

Economic Development and Social Distinctions

The Byzantine economy was centrally controlled by the bureaucracy in Constantinople, with a large peasant class that supplied food to people in the cities. The bureaucracy kept food prices artificially low to placate the urban lower classes, but this policy put great hardship on the peasants. Constantinople was by far the largest city, not just because it was the capital, but also because of its geographic position at the Bosphorus that connected the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. This location not only was ideal for defending the city, but also

for controlling long-distance trade routes that connected to East Asia, India, and Russia to the growing market in western Europe. Once the Byzantines learned the Chinese secrets for silk production, they developed a brisk silk production business, and also began manufacturing cloth, carpets, and other luxury products. Like the Chinese, the Byzantines did not grant merchants political power, primarily because the government bureaucrats did not want to share their power. In contrast to both China and Byzantium, merchants in western Europe had gained a greater political voice.



Constantinople's Geographic Advantage. Constantinople became one of the great cities of the world during the period from 600 to 1450 C.E. partly because of its geographic location on the Bosphorus, a narrow connection between the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea. From that position the city was central to long distance trade that connected east Asia, India, and Russia to western Europe. The position was also easily defensible since three sides of the city were surrounded by water, and ships could easily be seen from a long distance. On the one vulnerable side of the city to the west, strong walls were built, just as the Romans had done for centuries.

The situation for women deteriorated from the earlier freedom that Roman women had to venture outside their homes. Of course, the “paterfamilias” (old-

est male authority) had controlled family and public life, but during Byzantine times, women increasingly found themselves confined to the home. Some sources say that when they left their homes, they concealed their faces with veils. The only men they socialized with were members of their families. Despite these restrictions, it is interesting to note that from 1028 to 1056 women ruled the Byzantine Empire jointly with their husbands. Much earlier, Empress **Theodora** had exerted a great deal of influence over her husband, **Justinian**, who listened to and often followed her advice.

Cultural Achievements

In the early days of the Byzantine Empire, the official language was Latin, but most of the inhabitants spoke Greek. Eventually, Greek replaced Latin in government documents as well. The philosophy and literature of classical Greece had a much deeper influence in Byzantium than in western Europe, especially notable in Byzantine education. Byzantine aristocrats often hired tutors to provide private instruction for their children, girls as well as boys. Additionally a state-organized school system offered a primary education in basic reading, writing, and grammar, and those that entered the bureaucracy additionally studied classical Greek literature, philosophy, and science. Most peasants and many urban workers had no formal education, but basic literacy was widespread. The most ambitious and accomplished citizens attended a school of higher learning in Constantinople to study law, medicine, and philosophy. Byzantine scholars studied and wrote about the works of Homer, Plato, and Aristotle, and they copied many classical Greek works between the 10th and 12th centuries, preserving and transmitting the classical legacy.

One of the biggest accomplishments of the Eastern Orthodox Church was the conversion of many eastern Europeans to their branch of Christianity. Beginning in the 9th century, a competition emerged between the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholics for the allegiance of the Slavs. Both religions gained converts, with the Eastern Orthodox being most successful in Russia, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece. In those areas, Constantinople served not only as a religious model, but also as a legal, literary, and artistic influence as well. In contrast, the Poles, Czechs, and Croats turned more toward the Roman Catholic Church, as demonstrated in their adoption of the Roman alphabet for their languages. The **Cyrillic** writing system was adopted in the Eastern Orthodox countries, as invented by two Byzantine missionaries in order to communicate with their followers in their native languages. The expansion of both religions into eastern Europe deepened the rift between them that had been developing since the 4th century. After many years of friction and uneasy truces, the division came out into the open in 1054 when the Roman Catholic pope clashed with the Eastern Orthodox patriarch over a number of issues, with each attack-

ing the other's practices. It ended with the two leaders excommunicating each other, resulting in a division that still exists to this day.



COMPARISON: ROMAN CATHOLICISM AND EASTERN ORTHODOXY

The two major branches of Christianity split gradually over time, partly because they had very different geographic centers. They shared many common beliefs, but the chart below defines some of their differences.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Separation between political and religious leaders; competition between popes and kings for political power

Religious art conveyed Jesus as suffering for the sins of mankind.

Priests could not marry.

Gothic architecture was used for churches.

Theology was less influenced by Greek philosophy.

EASTERN ORTHODOXY

Union between political and religious leaders (caesaro-papism)

Religious art conveyed Jesus as majestic and divine.

Priests could marry.

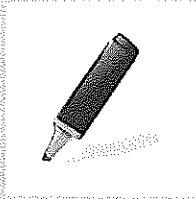
Church architecture was inspired by ancient Rome (arches, domes).

Theology was more influenced by Greek philosophy.

Byzantium and Russia

To the north of Byzantium, a Slavic people known as the Russians began to organize a large state from several principalities. The most important early city was Kiev, a thriving trading center on the Dnieper River along the main trade route between Scandinavia and Byzantium. Kiev came to dominate many of the other principalities, and their princes sought alliances with Byzantine rulers. Many Russian merchants visited Constantinople, became acquainted with Byzantine culture, and sparked the interest of their rulers in Orthodox Christianity. After the conversion of Prince Vladimir of Kiev in about 989, Byzantine influences flowed rapidly into Russia, including art, the Cyrillic alphabet, ar-

chitecture, law codes, and missions. By the early 12th century Kiev's population approached 30,000, and the city controlled trade all over the region, with eight thriving marketplaces within its borders. Long after Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, Byzantine influences lived on in Russia, with the Orthodox faith and Byzantine customs spreading rapidly as the Kievan principality transformed over time into the great Russian Empire that stretched from the Baltic Sea to Alaska.



MARKER EVENT IN RUSSIA: ACCEPTANCE OF BYZANTINE CULTURE

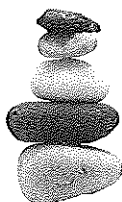
As Russia began to develop from the early Kievan state, Vladimir I made some important decisions that oriented Russia toward Byzantium and away from western Europe. When he first came to rule, he built a temple to the six gods his Slavic subjects worshipped, but soon became interested in the monotheistic religions developing in regions around him. The earliest Russian chronicle reports that Vladimir decided against Islam because of its ban on alcohol, and rejected Judaism because he could not understand how a powerful god would allow his people's temple to be destroyed. Although it is unclear why he did not choose Roman Catholicism, he almost certainly was swayed by the magnificent wealth of 10th century Constantinople and the beauty of Orthodox churches.

Once Orthodox Christianity was accepted, the Cyrillic alphabet began to be used and trade was oriented toward Byzantium. Once the Byzantine Empire fell, Russia became the incubator for Byzantine ways, and despite later attempts by Russian tsars to "westernize" and form alliances with western European nations, a different path was set for Russia. The cultural divide set the stage for many tensions between eastern and western Europe that developed in later times, including the "Cold War" of the 20th century.

As the era 600-1450 came to an end, western Europe was very much on the rise, and Byzantium was headed for its final fall in 1453 when a Turkish sultan captured Constantinople with a powerful army, equipped with artillery purchased from western Europe. Despite its demise, the Byzantine Empire left a lasting imprint on the world's history through its law codes, distinctive architecture, religion, and organizational structure long after the other classical civilizations had crumbled.

IDENTIFICATIONS AND CONCEPTS

barter
Benedictine Rule
Byzantine Empire
caesaropapism
canon law
Carolingian family
Charlemagne
Clovis
Crusades
excommunication, interdict
feudalism
Franks
ghettos
guilds
Hagia Sophia
Hanseatic League
heresy
Holy Roman Empire
Hundred Years War
Justinian, Justinian Code
limited government, parliaments
Magna Carta
manorialism
“Middle Ages”
missi dominici
pogroms
Renaissance
Saladin
Sassanid Empire
scholasticism
serfs
Theodora
usury
vernacular languages
Vikings



CHAPTER SEVEN: THE AMERICAS

While civilizations in the Eastern Hemisphere were changing during the era from 600 to 1450 C.E., civilizations in the Western Hemisphere were continuing to evolve along their separate paths. Nomadic groups and subsistence farmers populated North America, and more complex civilizations developed in Mesoamerica and the area around the Andes Mountains in South America. The earlier Olmec society of Mesoamerica had collapsed by 300 C.E. and was replaced by the Maya, the people of Teotihuacan, the Toltecs, and eventually the Aztecs. In South America, the Chavin society was also in decline by 300 C.E., and was replaced by several regional cultures, including the Mochica state and the Chimú state. By the end of the era, the people of the Americas were in their last days of isolation from the east, and most were enjoying halcyon days before the devastation that the 16th century would bring to their civilizations.

SOCIETIES IN MESOAMERICA

Scholars usually divide the era from 600 to 1450 C.E. in Mesoamerica into two sub-periods: classical (ending about 900) and post-classical (900 to 1450). Notice that the classical era in Mesoamerica occurred several hundred years after the classical era in the Eastern Hemisphere, reflecting the independent development of the two hemispheres until 1450. Classical civilizations include the Maya and the people of Teotihuacan, and examples of post-classical civilizations are the Toltecs and the Aztecs.

Classical Mesoamerica

The Olmec civilization disappeared completely by about 100 B.C.E., but many of their practices and beliefs appear to have been carried on in later civilizations. The earliest heirs of the Olmec were the **Maya**, who centered their society to the east and south of the Olmec settlements in what is now southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. The first permanent Maya villages appeared during the 3rd century B.C.E. in the highlands of Guatemala, with its fertile soil for agriculture. There they built a ceremonial center, Kaminaljuyu,