

CHAPTER 1

MEDIEVAL LEGACIES AND TRANSFORMING DISCOVERIES



Jacob Fugger (1455–1525) was one of the sons of a weaver who settled in the southern German town of Augsburg. At age fourteen, he joined his brothers as a trader in spices, silks, and woolen goods. He traded, above all, with the Adriatic port of Venice, where he learned double-entry book-keeping (keeping track of business credits and debits), which was then unknown in the German states. Jacob Fugger amassed a vast fortune, and he began to loan sizable sums to various rulers in Central Europe. Fugger's name soon became known "in every kingdom and every region, even among the heathens. Emperors, kings, princes, and lords sent emissaries to him; the pope hailed him and embraced him as his own dear son; the cardinals stood up when he appeared." When asked if he wanted to retire, Jacob Fugger replied that he intended to go on making money until he dropped dead.

The family history of the Fuggers intersected with economic growth and statemaking in Central Europe. The Fuggers emerged as the wealthiest and most influential of the international banking families that financed warring states, answering the call of the highest bidder. In 1519, the Fuggers helped Charles V become Holy Roman emperor by providing funds with which the scheming Habsburg could bribe the princes who were electors to vote for him. The Fuggers raised and transported the money that made possible imperial foreign policy. Loaning money to ambitious rulers, as well as to popes and military entrepreneurs, the Fugger family rose to princely status and facilitated the consolidation of territorial states and the emergence of a dynamic economy not only in the Mediterranean region but also in the German states and northwestern Europe by helping merchants and manufacturers find credit for their enterprises.

The growth of trade and manufacturing ultimately changed the face of Europe. The expanding economy contributed to a sense that many Europeans



(Left) Jacob Fugger, merchant-banker and creditor of rulers and popes, traded with the port of Seville (right), a stepping-off point for colonization of the New World.

had in 1500 of living in a period of rebirth and revitalization. In Italy, the cultural movement we know as the Renaissance was still in bloom, and it was spreading along trade routes across the Alps into northern Europe (see Chapter 2). The by-products of trade and exploration were an increasing exchange of ideas and a growing interconnectedness among European states.

Although famine, disease, and war (the horsemen of the apocalypse) still trampled their victims across Europe, significant improvements in the standard of living occurred. The European population rose in the late fifteenth century and continued to rise throughout the sixteenth century. Europe's population stood at about 70 million in 1500 and around 90 million in 1600 (well less than a third of that today). These gains overcame the horrific loss of one-third of the European population to the Black Death (the bubonic plague) in the mid-fourteenth century. The expansion of the population revived European commerce, particularly in the Mediterranean region and in England and northwestern Europe, where the Fuggers and other merchant-bankers were financing new industry and trade. Towns multiplied and their merchants grew more prosperous, building elegant houses near markets.

The pace of change was quickened by several inventions that would help shape the emergence of the modern world. Gunpowder, first used in China and adopted by Europeans in the fourteenth century, made warfare more deadly, gradually eliminating the heavily armed knight. The invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century engendered a cultural revolution first felt in religious life, with the Bible and other religious texts now more widely available to be read, discussed, and debated. The compass, first used to determine direction by Chinese and Mediterranean navigators

in the eleventh or twelfth century, now helped guide European exploration across the oceans.

Spanish and Portuguese conquerors and merchants seeking riches in the New World established the first European transoceanic empires. Population growth; the growth of trade and manufacturing, which facilitated the exchange of ideas and gradually increased the standard of living; the use of gunpowder and the compass; and the development of printing all stimulated and facilitated the establishment of colonies across the oceans by the European powers.

MEDIEVAL CONTINUITIES

England and France emerged as sovereign states, standing as exceptions amid the territorial fragmentation that characterized medieval Europe. Smaller territories also began to coalesce into larger units and rulers consolidated and extended their authority. European society took on the shape it would have for centuries, with three orders—clergy, nobles, and peasants—standing in relationships of mutual obligation to each other. Material well-being remained at a subsistence level for most peasants but nonetheless improved overall as commercial trade across greater distances began to rise in the eleventh century. Moreover, small-scale textile manufacturing developed as towns grew, particularly in Italy and northwestern Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The Fragmentation of Europe

With the end of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, Europe experienced an influx of new peoples. From the east came the Magyars (Hungarians), who settled in Central Europe, where they were converted to Christianity. From Scandinavia came the so-called Northmen (Norse or Vikings), who reached Ukraine, and who for the most part became Christians. Arabs invaded Europe in the eighth century, subsequently expanding their influence into North Africa, as well as Spain. Mongols poured into what is now Russia and Ukraine, sacking Kiev in the 1230s, before their empire began to collapse in the fifteenth century. The princely state of Muscovy, which had been one of their tributaries, gradually expanded in size, reaching the southern Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea and emerging as a dynastic state. This multitude of influences contributed to both the political and cultural fragmentation of Europe.

In 1500, Europe was a maze of about 1,500 fragmented states. Economic, political, and judicial institutions were overwhelmingly local. Territories and cities were subject to a confused array of overlapping jurisdictions. The city-states of Italy and the trading towns of northern Germany managed to preserve their independence from territorial rulers. The town walls that

protected residents against bandits and disease (during times of plague and epidemics) stood also as symbols of urban privileges. Paris, for example, was dotted with enclaves of ecclesiastical authority.

Part of Europe's fragmentation was due to its three systems of law: civil, canon, and customary. The legal concepts, principles, and procedures of civil law evolved from Roman law, which was based on the rational interpretation of written law applied to human affairs. Civil laws were decreed and thereby sanctioned by rulers, whose authority stemmed in part from their right to make or impose laws. The development of civil law, then, was conducive to the development of sovereign states by closely associating the power of rulers of states with the force of law. Canon law, established by the pope for the Western Church, codified in Latin the canons of Church councils and the revealed authorities of the Bible and Church fathers. As with civil law, canon law helped affirm, at least in principle, the authority of spiritual rulers—the popes, cardinals, and bishops—by closely linking the law to the authority of the rulers in general, whose subjects owed them personal allegiance.

Yet, to be sure, in the late Middle Ages, cross-cutting allegiances—the most common being to both secular and ecclesiastical authorities—were often the norm. Subjects of competing authorities used the system to exploit jurisdictional conflicts to their own ends, whenever possible. This sometimes served to reinforce the influence of multiple authorities. Thus, the effective authority of rulers could end up being rather distant.

Customary, or common law, was a codification of established custom, implying a constant reference to decisions taken earlier by judges. It was the usual mode of law in all areas where Roman law was not used. In Western Europe, customary law developed out of the customs of feudalism (see below), a set of reciprocal economic, social, and political relationships that encouraged decentralized power structures.

In England, where common law unified the customary law for the whole land, laws were overseen by local courts, which contributed to the decentralization of English royal authority. Unlike Roman law, which helped shape the sense that the ruler was a sovereign lawgiver who could override custom, customary law helped corporate groups (such as guilds, which were craft associations) or individuals assert their interests and rights by establishing precedents that, at least in principle, could override the ruler's intervention in the legal process.

Europe's political fragmentation was accompanied by cultural fragmentation, reinforced by the many languages spoken. Latin, the language of culture, was still spoken in university towns—thus the “Latin Quarter” in Paris. Distances and difficulties in travel and communication were also imposing. It sometimes took months for mail to arrive. The shortest time to travel from Madrid to Venice was twenty-two days, and the longest, in bad weather, was four times that.

At the Crossroads of Cultures

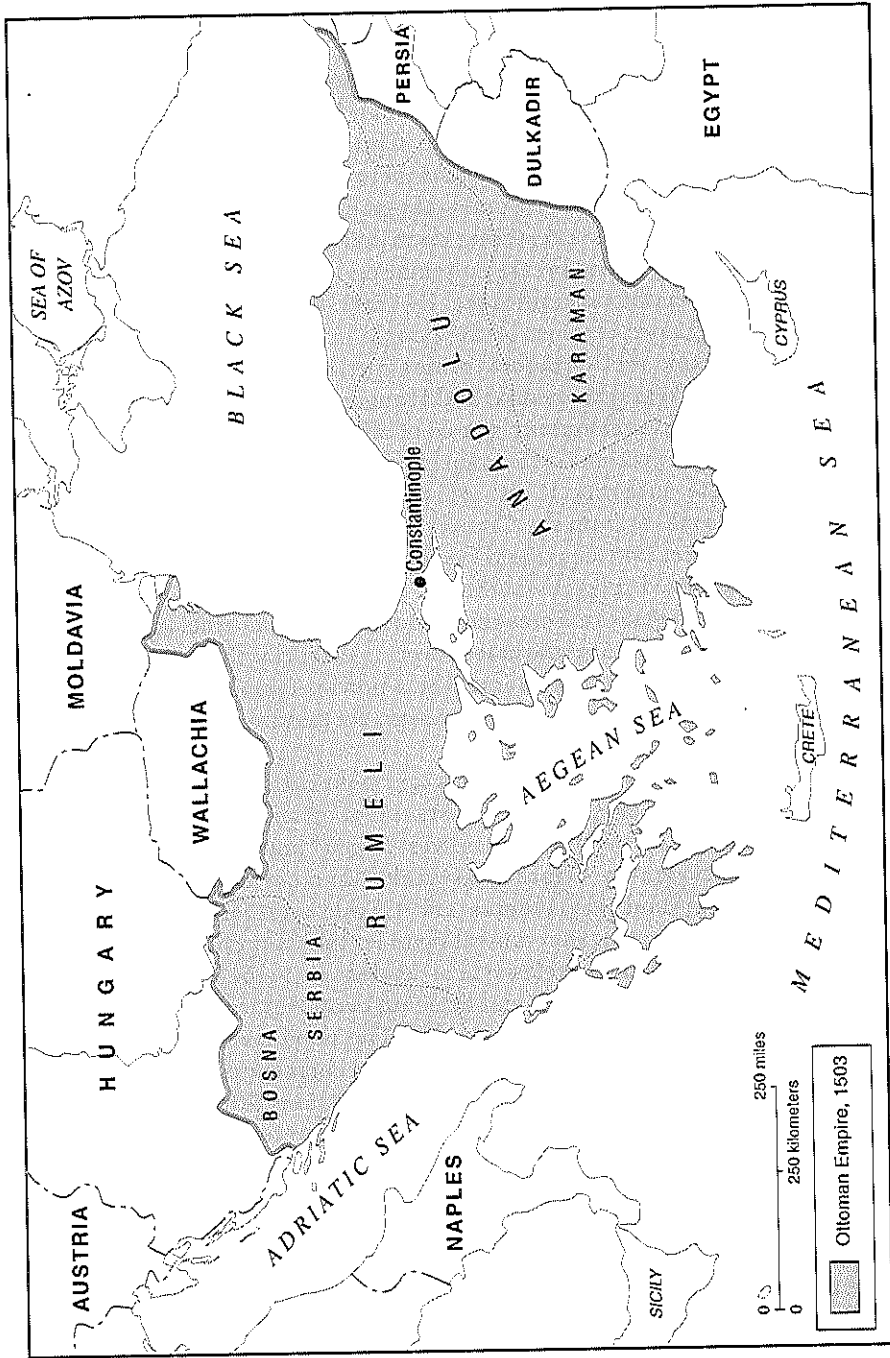
Europe stood at the crossroads between civilizations and religions (see Map 1.1). After the collapse of the Roman Empire, Christendom had been split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church following the Great Schism between the two churches in 1054. The claim by the bishop of Rome—the pope—to authority over all Eastern Christians (as well as a festering doctrinal dispute over the nature of the Holy Trinity) led to the break, culminating in the pope's excommunication of the patriarch of Constantinople. By 1500, the Eastern Orthodox Church held the allegiance of most of the people in Russia and the Balkans. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox worlds met in the eastern part of Central Europe, with Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary looking to the West.

Christianity, as an alternate source of allegiance and power claiming to be a universal state (with its own language, Latin), presented a potential impediment to state authority. It also provided a common culture that engulfed much of Europe. As both the Church and the monarchies became more centralized, conflict between them became inevitable. The Church itself had been a centralized religious authority since the end of the Roman Empire, which left the papacy in Rome independent of secular rule. After the middle of the eleventh century, the popes were elected by the Church cardinals, each of whom had been appointed by a previous pope. Bishops and abbots pledged obedience to the pope in return for tenure over abbey lands and ecclesiastical revenues.

In the Ottoman Empire, religious and political sovereignty rested in the same person, the sultan. In contrast, rulers of territorial states in Europe had succeeded in making themselves largely autonomous from Church authority. Although the Church was wealthy and powerful (owning about 25 percent of the land of Catalonia and Castile and perhaps 65 percent in southern Italy), princes were unwilling to let the Church interfere with their authority, even though ecclesiastical leaders in many cases had crowned them. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, rulers refused to allow ecclesiastical courts in their territories. The pope commanded his bishops and other clergy to be loyal to the rulers of secular states.

During the medieval period, Western Christians attempted to win back lands conquered by Muslims, especially seeking to recapture Jerusalem. The first of eight "Crusades" that lasted to 1270 began in 1095. In 1204, believing the Eastern Orthodox religion to be heresy, the Crusaders conquered the Eastern Orthodox Byzantine Empire, which had extended from eastern Italy to the Black Sea's eastern end. In the mid-fourteenth century, the Ottoman Turks conquered two-thirds of Anatolia, much of the Balkan Peninsula, and Greece. By 1400, Islam stretched from southern Spain and North Africa all the way to northern India and beyond to islands in Southeast Asia. During the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the Byzantine Empire (which was Greek in culture and Eastern Orthodox Christian in religion) was

MAP 1.1 THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, c. 1500



reduced to a small area straddling the straits between Asia and Europe, which included its capital, Constantinople (modern Istanbul). Finally, the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople after a lengthy siege in 1453, the final act of the decline of the Byzantine Empire. During the next four decades, the Ottomans doubled their European territory, conquering Serbia in 1459, Bosnia in 1463, Albania in 1479, and Herzegovina in 1483. The addition of Hungary extended the Ottoman Empire to the Danube River.

The Ottoman Turks possessed a large army—much of it recruited from converts to Islam, notably the infantry (the janissaries)—and a strong navy. Effective diplomacy complemented military strength. During the first half of the sixteenth century, the Ottomans also absorbed Egypt and moved into Iran, reaching Baghdad in what is now Iraq in 1534, and then the Persian Gulf. This was the apogee of the Ottoman Empire, which made use of loyal elites at the local level to bring in the revenues that financed the state. For the next several centuries, Roman Catholic Europe would view Islam as a perpetual threat to its religion and culture. Yet a sizable majority of the myriad populations the Ottoman Turks ruled remained Christian and were allowed to continue to practice their religion. Despite the existence of a common Islamic high culture, the Islamic Ottoman Turks accepted non-Muslims in their empire, and the latter always represented a significant majority of the population. In contrast, Christian states systematically persecuted and expelled Muslims. For centuries, Western writers outdid each other in describing the Ottoman Turks as “the scourge of God,” barbaric, despotic, and cruel. However, the Russian Orthodox Church (which was greatly influenced by its Byzantine heritage), Greek Orthodox Church (also an Eastern Orthodox Church), Roman Catholic Church, and the Islamic religion coexisted remarkably well in the Balkans under Ottoman Turkish rule. The Ottomans established the *millet* system, which allowed autonomy for religious minorities, with leaders of religious communities appointed by the sultan.

Much of Europe thus confronted a huge semicircle of states under direct or indirect Turkish control. The Western powers, which had launched Christian crusades against the Muslims, now were forced into a series of defensive wars against Islam, which to the West was embodied by the Ottoman Empire. To aid in their defense, the Venetians constructed a series of fortifications along the Adriatic coast.

The Structure of Society

Medieval society was roughly divided into three social groups: the clergy, who prayed and cared for souls; nobles, who governed and fought; and peasants, who labored in the fields. Burghers, town residents whose entrepreneurial activity made possible the economic dynamism of medieval Europe between 1000 and 1350, were, despite their increasing importance, outside this classical typology.

The clergy had many roles, serving as priests, teachers, judges, nurses, landlords, and chaplains. But they could only be tried in ecclesiastical courts, and, in the evolution of the modern state, their status as a group apart would come into question. The secular clergy (that is, priests who did not belong to a specific religious order) ministered to the population as a whole. Most of the secular clergy were as poor as their parishioners, but bishops generally were from noble families. The regular clergy included hundreds of thousands of monks and nuns living in monasteries and convents according to strict religious rules, cut off from the outside world by their vows (and in some places legally considered dead).

Nobles owned most of the land, with their status and income stemming from this, as well as from their military functions. Noble titles connoted superiority of birth, and noble families usually intermarried. Nobles were not supposed to work but were to stand ready to defend their monarch and the interests and honor of their families.

Peasants, who made up about 85 percent of the population of Europe in 1500, lived in villages or in small settlements on the lands of nobles, dependent on the latter for protection in exchange for labor. Peasants had no legal status, with the exception of those (for the most part in Western Europe) who owned land. In some places, they were considered barely better than animals by the lords who oppressed them and the clergy who told them their lot in life was to suffer in anticipation of heavenly rewards.

Villages or, within towns, parishes formed the universe of most Europeans. Local solidarities took precedence over those to the rulers of states, whose effective reach in many places remained quite limited. Many villages were, for all intents and purposes, virtually self-governing; village councils decided which crops would be planted on common land and set the date

The poor man, the artisan, and the lord in the late fifteenth century. Note the subservient role of women and children in each family.





In this Italian miniature from 1492, a vassal kneels to formally certify his allegiance to his lord and cement their mutual obligations to each other.

obligations; likewise, a king or lord could punish a vassal who neglected his obligations to his lord. Elaborate ceremonies featuring solemn oaths, sworn before God and blessed by churchmen, specified the mutual obligations of lord and vassal. "You are mine," a powerful lord in Aquitaine in what is now southwestern France reminded a vassal, "to do my will." Thus, feudalism was a system in which the more powerful extracted revenue or services from the less powerful, with the peasantry, at the bottom of social hierarchy, the weakest of them all.

Feudalism finally waned in the monarchical states in the late fourteenth century with the emergence of stronger state structures, as well as the reimplosion of the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in much of Europe. Thus, feudal relationships dissolved as the strength of rulers increased and the independence of nobles declined in stronger states. Royal courts gradually usurped the judicial authority of nobles (although in some places not entirely). Furthermore, the development of a money economy (payment in gold or silver, or in coins minted by rulers) increasingly made feudal relationships obsolete. One sign of this was the shift to cash payment by peasants to lords, instead of payment in services, crops, or animals.

The Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century also helped sound the death knell of feudalism in Western Europe by killing off one-third to one-half of the population (see "A Rising Population," p. 19). As wages rose because of a shortage of labor, peasants were able to improve their legal status. The plague had also killed many lords. When lords tried to reimpose feudal relationships, some spectacular rebellions occurred. Resentment against royal troops (along with the imposition of new taxes) contributed to peasant rebellions in Flanders (1323–1328), northern France (the Jacquerie of 1358), and the Peasants' Revolt in England in 1381. There was also unrest among the urban poor, as ordinary people resisted attempts to return to the way things were before. States took advantage of the chaos by assessing new taxes, such as the hearth tax (a tax on households). By increasing

plowing was to begin. Such councils coexisted with the seigneurial authority of lords.

At least a fifth of the European population lived in dire poverty. For ordinary laborers, three-quarters of their earnings went to purchase food. Towns and cities were crowded with poor people struggling to get by. A pope complained of vagrants in Rome "who fill with their groans and cries not only public places and private houses but the churches themselves; they provoke alarms and incidents; they roam like brute beasts with no other care than the search for food." The poor wandered everywhere their feet could carry them, finding work where they could, sometimes begging, sometimes stealing. Acts of charity, encouraged by the Catholic Church, which viewed such acts as essential for salvation, helped many poor people survive. But while poor beggars from within communities were tolerated and sometimes given assistance, townspeople and villagers alike feared the poor outsider, particularly gypsies. Banditry was pervasive most everywhere, for example, between Venetian and Turkish territory, between the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples, and in the Pyrenees Mountains. The story of Robin Hood, the thirteenth-century English bandit and popular hero alleged to have stolen from the rich to give to the poor, had its continental counterparts.

Feudalism

Feudalism developed during the ninth and tenth centuries in response to the collapse of the authority of territorial rulers. Between about A.D. 980 and 1030, law and order broke down in much of Europe, and violence became the norm. This unstable period was characterized by warfare between clans and between territorial lords, attended by retinues of armed men, as well as the ravages of predatory bands. The power structure (king, lords, vassals, and peasants) that emerged in feudal times was a reaction against the anarchy and instability of earlier years. Feudalism also should be seen in the context of an overwhelmingly agricultural economy, where rulers and lords retained great estates.

Despite an increase in the power of great lords, there remained a crucial difference between a king and a lord. Kings were anointed by the ecclesiastical authority in a sacred rite, and therefore claimed to rule "by the grace of God" even when they were incapable of coercing the great lords and their families. The mighty lords imposed obligations of loyalty and military service on "vassals." Their vassals received, in exchange, protection and the use of lands (called fiefs) to which, at least in principle, the lords retained rights. The heirs of vassals would inherit the same conditions, although a vassal had to pay the lord a fee upon inheriting an estate. Vassals agreed to fight for their lord for a certain number of days a year and to ransom the lord if he were captured. For their part, lords adjudicated disputes between vassals. Vassals could join together to oppose a king who failed to meet his

their authority, the monarchies of Western Europe gradually brought the feudal era to a close.

A Subsistence Economy

Agriculture lay at the base of the European economy, in which the ownership of land was the principal determinant of status. Peasants were constantly engaged in a protracted and, more often than not, losing battle against nature. Much land was of poor quality, including hilly and rocky terrain or marshland that could not be farmed. In most of Europe, small plots, poor and exhausted soil, and traditional farming techniques limited yields. Steep slopes had to be cleared and terraced by hand. Peasants plowed with hand “swing” plows. Furthermore, villages held some land in common, originally granted by lords. This was economically wasteful, but for centuries common land offered the landless poor a necessary resource for survival. And under the best of circumstances, peasants had to save about one-fifth to one-eighth of their seed for replanting the following year.

Peasants owed their lords most of what they produced. Peasants also had to pay part of what meager benefits they managed to extract from the land to lords, by virtue of the latter’s status and ownership of land. Lords increasingly found it more advantageous to rent out plots of land, and gradually many commuted labor services to cash, which they spent on goods, including luxuries, available at expanding markets and fairs. These included silk, cotton, and some spices that traders brought from the Levant (countries bordering on the eastern Mediterranean). Peasants (like other social groups) also had to tithe (give 10 percent of their revenue) to the Church. These tithes had traditionally been in-kind, but they were increasingly monetized during the late Middle Ages. In a fundamentally subsistence economy, this left the rural poor—that is, most families—with little on which to get by.

Yet even with the rise in population, lords in the thirteenth century had faced frequent shortages of labor and were forced to grant favorable terms to peasants. Many peasants in Western Europe succeeded in purchasing their freedom, transforming their obligations into rents paid to the lords. Nonetheless, even free peasants still had to pay feudal dues to lords and fees for the right to mill grain, brew beer, or bake bread, monopolies that the lords retained.

Serfdom began to disappear in France and southern England in the twelfth century. Rulers had reason to encourage the movement toward a free peasantry in Western Europe, because free peasants could be taxed, whereas serfs—who were legally attached to the land they worked—were entirely dependent on the lords who owned the land. In Western Europe, the free peasantry reflected the growth in the authority of rulers and a relative decline in that of nobles. In the West, most peasant holdings were increasingly protected by civic law or by custom.



Pieter Bruegel the Elder: *The Peasants' Wedding* (1568). On that special day, they would probably eat as well as they ever would.

In contrast to the emergence of a free peasantry in the West, most peasants in Eastern and Central Europe lost their freedom during the sixteenth century, forced to become serfs as landowners sought to assure themselves of a stable labor supply. This in itself was a sign that nobles there were carving out territorial domination virtually independent from that of kings and other rulers, as in Poland.

Many people were constantly on the move in Europe. Free peasants moved toward the frontiers of Europe in search of land, which they brought under cultivation. Peddlers, artisans, and agricultural laborers traveled great distances in search of work. Shepherds led their sheep from the plains to summer pastures at higher elevations, and then back down in the fall (transhumance). Hundreds of thousands of rural people also migrated seasonally from the Pyrenees, Alps, and other mountainous regions to undertake construction work in towns, or to follow the harvests. Roads were also full of vagabonds and beggars.

Most poor families survived by eating bread and not much else. For peasants, meat was something that lords and burghers ate, fruit was rare, and vegetables were poor; rye bread, soup, and perhaps peas, cabbage, and beans were the staples of the peasant's diet, depending on the region. In southern France, grain made from chestnuts served as the bread of the poor. The Mediterranean lands produced olives and wine, as well as wheat.

Beer was limited to northern Europe, particularly the German states, England, and Scandinavia.

Agricultural growth, which had been steady until the beginning of the fourteenth century, slowed down until the mid-fifteenth century in the wake of the Black Death. But once the population began to grow again, plots that had been abandoned were plowed once more. In regions of relatively fertile land, the "three-field system" became more common. This left about a third of all land fallow (unplanted) in order to replenish its fertility during the growing season. This mode of agricultural production necessitated relatively sizable landholdings, and thus could not be used on small peasant plots. But over the long run it increased agricultural yields. Yet this did not necessarily aid the peasant family, because dependency on a seigneur could force them to give more attention to cultivation in the interest of the lord, leaving less time to supplement the family economy by hunting, fishing, or looking after livestock. Overall, however, farming techniques and tools improved during the fifteenth century. Innovations such as the use of mills and metal harvesting implements were introduced, although not adopted in some places until much later. These methods would remain basically the same until the nineteenth century.

Free peasants contributed to the rise in agricultural production. Not all peasants were desperately poor. Many could survive (and a minority did quite well) when famine, disease, and war left them alone, selling in the nearest market what produce they had left over after replanting and obligations to lords and the Church had been paid up for that year.

The medieval innovation of the three-field system allowed for the renewal of one field by leaving it fallow for a season.



The growth in the European population during the medieval period depended on these modest increases in agricultural yields. Some lords became market-oriented farmers in response to increased population. This in itself increased agricultural production. In England, Flanders, northern France, and Sicily (as well as North Africa), grain was intensively cultivated for the market. Urban growth encouraged cash-crop farming, enriching nearby landlords, merchants, and wealthy peasants. Prosperous agriculture was to be found in the rich valley of the Po River in central Italy, the plains of Valencia in Spain, and the Beauce, between the Loire River and Paris. Landowners brought more land under cultivation, cleared forests, drained marshes and swamps, and where possible, irrigated arid fields.

Religion and Popular Culture

Religion played an enormous part in the lives of Europeans in the Middle Ages. Christianity shaped a general system of belief and values that defined the way most people viewed themselves and the world in which they lived. The Church, its faith and learning preserved during the so-called Dark Ages before the medieval period, viewed itself as a unifying force in Europe. This gave the clergy great prestige and moral authority as distributors of the sacraments (above all, penance, the forgiveness of sins), without which Christians believed that salvation could not be achieved. When preachers passed through villages, the faithful waited long into the night to have their confessions heard. One of Europe's most traveled routes took pilgrims from many countries to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Castile (Spain). The Church blessed oaths of fealty (loyalty) sworn by vassals to lords and rulers, and it took an important role in the rites of passage (birth, marriage, death). The Italian Renaissance (see Chapter 2), to be sure, would rediscover the dignity of humanity, but did so within the context of Christian belief.

Religious themes and subjects permeated virtually all medieval art and music. In the twelfth century, magnificent Gothic cathedrals began to be built. The construction of these colossal churches often lasted as long as a century, absorbing enormous resources, and paid for by gifts, large and small, from people of all walks of life. Church bells tolled the hours (clocks would remain novelties until the end of the sixteenth century) and called people to Mass.

Western Christendom was interlocked with Western civilization, although Muslim and Jewish heritages remained strong in Spain and Turkish-controlled areas. Jews remained outcasts, although in general they did not live apart from the Christian population until the fifteenth century, when they were forced to do so by civil and ecclesiastical authorities. The popes forced Jews in Rome to wear distinctive badges; Venice established the first Jewish "ghetto" in 1516. Many Jews, forbidden to enter certain trades, were forced to wander in search of towns where they could live in relative peace.

Storytellers, both amateur and professional, kept oral traditions of popular culture alive at a time when most people were illiterate. Accomplished storytellers passed on their tales during evening gatherings, when villagers, principally women, gathered together to mend garments, tell stories, and keep warm. Many of these stories and tales reflected the fatalism of societies in which most people died relatively young.

Most people believed in magic and the presence of the supernatural on earth. By such views, sorcerers or saints could intervene between people and the bad luck that might befall them. Primitive healers were believed to stand between disease and survival. People believed that rubbing certain saints' images could bring good fortune. When the wine harvest failed in some parts of France, villagers whipped statues of the saints that had failed them. Superstitions abounded. In some places it was believed that it was a good sign to encounter a wolf, deer, or bear, that a stork landing on a house assured its occupants of wealth and longevity, that meeting a white-robed monk in the morning was a bad omen and a black-robed one a good one, that a crow cawing over the house of someone sick meant death was on its way, and that a magpie announced a cure. In the Balkans, garlic was believed to ward off evil. Such beliefs helped peasants cope with a world in which droughts, harvest failures, accidents, and myriad fatal illnesses could bring personal and family catastrophe. "Cunning folk" and witches were believed by many to determine earthly events. A "cunning man" might discover the identity of a thief by placing papers with names inside little clay balls; the guilty party's name would be the first to unravel inside a bucket of water.

A village festival.



Religious holidays and festivals interspersed the calendar year, still governed by the agricultural calendar. At the beginning of Lent in some places in Western Europe, frolicking young men carried torches of blazing straw through the village to ensure agricultural and sexual fertility. Carnival was the highlight of the year for most people in early modern Europe. People ate and drank as at no other time, tossing flour, eggs, and fruit at each other and playing games. Carnival also stood the world on its head, if only briefly. The poor acted out the misdeeds of the wealthy in elaborate plays. Ordinary people could poke fun at the powerful in elaborately staged farces and parades by spoofing the behavior of judges, nobles, and clergymen.

THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY MODERN EUROPE

The late Middle Ages brought significant economic, social, and political changes that shaped the emergence of early modern Europe. Following the devastation of the Black Death in the fourteenth century, Europe's population slowly revived and then grew. More land was brought into cultivation, providing a greater supply of food. Yet the balance between life and death remained precarious; famine, disease, and war still intervened frequently to check population growth.

However, the continent's trade and manufacturing developed rapidly, particularly in the Mediterranean region (especially the Italian city-states) and in northwestern Europe. Prosperous banking families provided capital for traders and manufacturers, as they did for states, and basic mechanisms for the transfer of credit evolved. Trade with Asia and the Middle East developed at a rapid pace, catching up with the amount of trade Europeans carried out with the Muslim world. Towns grew in size, and their merchants became more prosperous, reflecting the importance of trade and textile manufacturing on urban growth. As they grew richer, some merchant families purchased land and noble titles. Merchants became important figures in every state. Many nobles resented the new status of these commoners, believing the old saying, "The king could make a nobleman, but not a gentleman." The growing prosperity of the entrepreneurial elite of many towns in Western Europe reflected their relative independence from territorial rulers. One of the characteristics of this independent status was the proliferation of guilds and other organizations that reflected a more dynamic economy.

Yet some aspects of the modern state system were already in place. During the period from 1350 to 1450, the rulers of France, Spain, England, Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Hungary consolidated and extended their authority over their territories, eroding the domains of feudal lords and ecclesiastical authorities. The Iberian Peninsula was divided between Castile and Aragon—joined through the marriage of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in 1469, forming contemporary Spain—and Portugal, the borders of

which have not changed since the late Middle Ages. The basic layout of three Scandinavian states already existed. And important states of East Central and Central Europe (Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland-Lithuania, a confederation created in 1386 and which early in the sixteenth century extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea), were already reasonably well defined. Even the Swiss cantonal federation had emerged. Most of the small territorial fragments lay in the German states or Italy.

A Rising Population

Europe's population had almost doubled between 1000 and 1300, rising from about 40 million to about 75 million people. But early in the fourteenth century, the population began to decline, probably because of rampant disease. Then, in the middle of the century, the Black Death ravaged Europe, killing between a third and half of the European population. Spread by fleas carried by rats, the bubonic plague reached Constantinople from Asia in 1347. Within three years, it had torn through Europe. Victims died horrible deaths, some in a few days, others lingering in agony. Some villages were completely abandoned, as people tried to flee the path of the scourge. In vain, states and cities tried frantically to prevent the arrival of travelers, fearful that they carried plague with them.

For the next century, births and deaths remained balanced (with higher mortality rates in cities wiping out increased births in the countryside). Europe only began to recover during the second half of the fifteenth century, thanks to a lull in epidemics and the absence of destructive wars. However, the population did not reach the level it had been at in 1300 until about 1550, when it began to rise rapidly, particularly in northern Europe (see Table 1.1).

Europeans remained perpetually vulnerable to disease and disaster. The bubonic plague was the worst of epidemics, but influenza, typhus, malaria, typhoid, and smallpox also carried off many people, particularly the poor, who invariably suffered from inadequate nutrition. Moreover, Europeans looked to the heavens not only in prayer but also to watch for the bad weather that could ruin harvests, including storms that brought flooding. Famine still devastated regularly, a natural disaster that checked population growth, killing off infants, children, and old people in the greatest numbers. "Nothing new here," a Roman wrote in the mid-sixteenth century, "except that people are dying of hunger."

Life for most people was short. Life expectancy, once one had made it out of infancy and childhood alive, was about forty years. Women lived longer than men, but many of them died during childbirth. About a fifth of all babies born died before they reached their first birthday. Of 100 children born, less than half lived to age twenty and only about a fifth celebrated a fortieth birthday. Christ, who died at age thirty-three, was not considered to have died young.

TABLE 1.1 THE EUROPEAN POPULATION IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES (IN MILLIONS)

	1500	1600
Spain and Portugal	9.3	11.3
Italian states	10.5	13.3
France	16.4	18.5
Low Countries*	1.9	2.9
British Isles	4.4	6.8
Scandinavia	1.5	2.4
German states	12.0	15.0
Switzerland	0.8	1.0
Balkans	7.0	8.0
Poland	3.5	5.0
Russia	9.0	15.5

*Currently Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

Source: Richard Mackenney, *Sixteenth-Century Europe: Expansion and Conflict* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 51.

The balance between life and death was precarious. In most towns, deaths outnumbered births almost every year. Prosperous families had more children than the poor (the opposite pattern of today). The exposure and abandonment of newly born infants was common. Furthermore, couples may have limited births through sexual abstinence. The fact that one partner often died prematurely also served as a check on population. So too did relatively late marriage. Most English men married at between twenty-six and twenty-nine years of age, women between twenty-four and twenty-six years.

The choice of a marriage partner was important for economic reasons (although in parts of Western Europe, up to a fifth of women never married). Marriages were often arranged—parents played a major and often determining role in choosing partners for their children. For families of means, particularly nobles, the promise of a sizable dowry counted for much. Yet some evidence suggests that by the end of the sixteenth century, at least in England, the inclinations of the bride and groom were sometimes difficult to ignore. For the poor, marriage could offer the chance of improving one's situation. Thus, a young woman whose family could provide a dowry, however modest, or who had a skill, was an attractive prospective spouse, as was a young man with a trade.

Wives remained legally subservient to their husbands, although in the "economy of makeshifts" in the poor household their role as managers of income and as workers gave them some minimal degree of equality. Sexual infidelity, while common, ran against the grain of a popular sense of justice, which placed a premium on loyalty and mutual obligation between marriage partners. Such liaisons might also jeopardize the system of inher-

itance and the protection of family property by leading to the appearance of unanticipated offspring, in an age when contraceptive techniques were rudimentary and not well known. Still, about a fifth of English brides were pregnant at the time of their wedding, as sexual relations between couples expecting to marry were very common.

Kinship and village solidarities defined the lives of ordinary people. In some places, extended families were common; that is, parents and sometimes other relatives lived with couples. In some places, such as England, the nuclear family (a couple and their children) was the most common household. When children of the lower classes began their working lives—usually at the age of fourteen or fifteen, or earlier for some apprentices—their obligations to their parents did not end. Often, however, they left home in search of work, rarely, if ever, to return. The poor turned to family and neighbors for help in bad times, as well as for help with harvests, if they owned land.

An Expanding Economy

One of the hallmarks of medieval society had been the marked expansion of trade and manufacture that began in the eleventh century. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, merchants greatly increased the amount of products carried on land routes and in the low galley-ships that hugged the Mediterranean coastline, more confident than ever before that their goods would find purchasers. In the markets of Flanders and northern France, olive oil, fruit, and wine from the Mediterranean region were exchanged for timber, cereals, and salted herring.

With the expansion in commercial activity, a money economy slowly developed. Yet trade and barter remained important, particularly for peasants, most of whom were part of a subsistence economy. Currency still did not penetrate some mountainous regions.

Yet overall, the late Middle Ages brought a significant rise in the availability of credit to states and entrepreneurs. Banking families in Venice and other Italian city-states were already well-established in the thirteenth century. Some merchants were no longer itinerant travelers, but rather sedentary entrepreneurs able to raise capital, such as from borrowing from banking families or other merchants or moneylenders, and extend and obtain credit. They also developed bills of exchange (see Chapter 5), which were orders drawn upon an agent to pay another merchant money at a future date, perhaps in another country and in another currency. Here and there, merchants began to work on a commission basis, and some specialized in transporting goods. They began to keep registers of profits and losses, using double-entry bookkeeping. All these changes facilitated a commercial boom in the sixteenth century, even if the multiplicity of states and the tolls between and within them hindered commerce.

The sixteenth century also brought a marked increase in basic manufacturing, which in some regions may have multiplied by 500 percent. The



Bankers sitting behind their *banco* (counter) doing business.

extraction of iron, copper, and silver quadrupled, for example, in Central Europe. Large-scale production, however, was limited to mining and textiles, as well as to arms manufacturing and shipbuilding.

The production of textiles, whether for distant markets or local consumption, dominated the manufacturing economy. Techniques for the production of silk had been imported from China into Europe by Arabs in the tenth century. First centered in the Italian states, production spread during the second half of the fifteenth century across the Alps to the German states, France, and Spain, which no longer depended on imported silk from Persia and Asia.

The manufacture of cloth developed in Tuscany, northern France, Flanders, and the Netherlands. The woolens industry of Flanders, which had begun during the medieval period, boomed, centered in the towns of Ypres, Ghent, and Bruges. England, which continued to export wool to the continent, became a major producer of woolen goods in the fourteenth century. Antwerp emerged as Europe's first important center of international trade.

Urban merchants and artisans were organized into guilds, which regulated production and distribution, thus protecting, at least in principle, guild members and consumers. The structure of craft production was organized hierarchically. Apprentices who learned their craft became journeymen and, if all went well, could eventually become masters, joining a masters' guild and employing journeymen and training apprentices. Most cloth was finished in towns by craft artisans. Through the guilds, masters could preserve the quality of work within their particular trades and, at the same time, the reputations of their town. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it became increasingly difficult for journeymen to become independent master craftsmen. Early in the sixteenth century, some German journeymen refused to work for masters who paid them less than they desired or had been used to receiving.



In the cottage (domestic) industry, merchant-capitalists put out spinning, weaving, and other work into the countryside. Here a woman is spinning in her home.

Some craftsmen worked outside the walls of cities or in the countryside to avoid guild monopolies and specifications on wages and piece rates. Likewise, merchant-capitalists who owned raw materials put out spinning, weaving (sometimes renting out looms), and other work into the countryside, where labor was cheaper. Rural production spread rapidly in northern Italy, the Netherlands, northern France, and England between 1450 and 1550. Hundreds of thousands of peasants produced woolen or linen yarn or wove it into cloth; then urban workers dyed, bleached, or shrunk the cloth, which merchants then sold. This “cottage industry” (also sometimes called “domestic industry”) would remain an important part of the manufacturing process well into the nineteenth century.

The Growth of Towns

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, European towns grew rapidly in both number and size, reflecting economic development and increased security in medieval Europe. Fortified stone ramparts, gates, and towers gave towns unique visible characteristics. Towns were the residence of most courts (including municipal courts), hospitals, and fraternal associations, such as religious confraternities and guilds. Town halls and churches were the cornerstones of the medieval towns. In addition to the “bourgeois” or “burghers” (townspeople), most towns had a relatively large number of clergy living within their walls, ministering to the needs of the population or living a cloistered existence in convents and monasteries.

Most major towns in Europe were founded before 1300. In Poland, about 200 new towns were created between 1450 and 1550, adding to the 450 already in existence. Northern Italy and the Low Countries had the densest

networks of towns. However, even there town dwellers remained a relatively small minority of the population, no more than about 15 percent. In 1500 only about 6 percent of Europeans resided in towns of more than 10,000 people. In the German states, about 200 of 3,000 towns had more than 10,000 residents. Only Constantinople, Naples, Milan, Paris, and Venice had more than 100,000 inhabitants.

In Italy, Venice, Florence, Genoa, Milan, and Pisa became independent city-states in about 1100, establishing control over surrounding smaller towns and villages. The decline of the Byzantine Empire and the inability of the Holy Roman Empire to establish its authority throughout Italy prevented the development of large territorial states on the peninsula. The prosperity of the city-states, too, impeded the creation of a single state, or even two or three major ones. Freed of feudal overlords, the dynamism of these city-states underlay the Renaissance (see Chapter 2). Venetian and Genoese merchants sent trading fleets carrying goods to and from the Levant and beyond, as well as along the spice routes to Central Asia, India, and China (visited by the Italian adventurer Marco Polo during his long voyage from 1275 to 1292).

In northern Europe, as well, the growth of cities and towns was linked to the expansion of long-distance trade and commerce. In northern Germany, independent trading towns were enriched by the Baltic grain trade, as Polish landowners, like their Hungarian and Bohemian counterparts, exported grain to the Netherlands and other Western countries. Lübeck and Hamburg with other northern German trading cities formed the Hanseatic League, which at first was a federation established to defend against banditry. These towns began to thrive in the mid-twelfth century, establishing networks of trade that reached from London all the way to Novgorod in northwestern Russia. The Polish Baltic port of Gdańsk had its own currency, fleet, army, and diplomats. Likewise, towns in southern Germany formed leagues to resist territorial lords and to protect trade routes. The fairs held outside the towns of Champagne in northern France, as well as in Lyon and Beaucaire farther south on the Rhône, served as trading points between northern Europe and Mediterranean merchants. The market function of trading towns swelled their populations. Landowners, particularly in regions of commercialized agriculture, sold their produce in the town markets.

Medieval Europe boasted major urban centers of learning. Paris (theology), Montpellier (medicine), and Bologna (Roman law) were major university centers. Oxford and Cambridge Universities were founded in the thirteenth century. Universities existed not in the sense that we know them today. Rather, the term referred to a corporately organized body of students or masters in one town. By 1500, dozens of towns had universities. And, in turn, literacy (limited to a small proportion of the population) rose faster in towns than in the countryside, as the equivalent of secondary education—limited to a privileged few—shifted from rural monasteries to town church or grammar schools.

Town governments were dominated by oligarchies of rich merchants, guild masters, and property owners (in Italian towns, nobles were part of these oligarchies). Despite the fact that many peasants still lived in towns, working fields outside town walls during the day and returning home before the gates slammed shut at nightfall, town and country seemed in some ways worlds apart.

Municipal Liberties

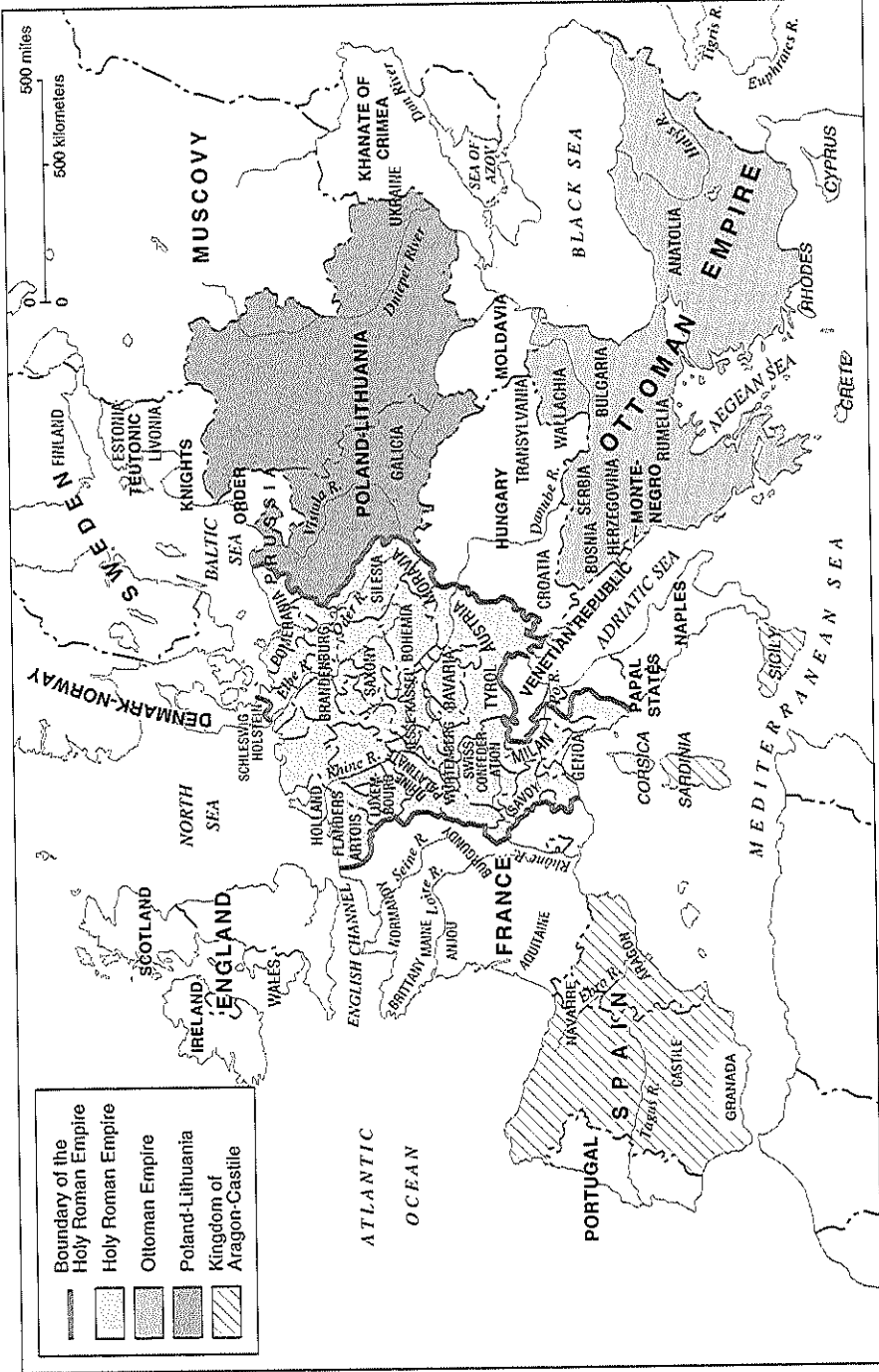
In feudal Europe, towns stood as zones of freedom, because their residents were not, in most cases, bound by service obligations to lords. Contemporaries held that "town air makes [one] free." No town person in Western Europe could be a serf. Urban freedoms had to be obtained from lords, however. Towns purchased charters of exemption from taxes in exchange for payments. Urban oligarchs jealously guarded this municipal independence against nobles and rulers eager to attain revenue and political consolidation. In some cases, rulers actively sought alliances with towns against nobles. Towns could also loan money to kings waging war against recalcitrant vassals or other rulers, including popes. Where territorial rulers were weak, as in Italy and the German states, towns obtained the greatest degree of freedom. Towns developed less rapidly in areas where rulers and nobles exercised strong authority.

Traditions of municipal liberties would leave a significant heritage in Western Europe, ultimately shaping the emergence of constitutional forms of government. Whereas social relationships in the countryside were largely defined by personal obligations, in towns these were replaced by collective rights through guilds and other associations. In England, northern France, the Netherlands, Flanders, and Switzerland, urban medieval confraternities struggled to maintain their independence from rulers and rural nobles. Lacking the associational infrastructure of many towns in Western Europe, however, Eastern European towns were not able to stem the tide of the increasing power of nobles and, in the case of Russia, the tsars. As the Muscovite state expanded its authority, the tsars ran roughshod over urban pretensions. Most towns in the East enjoyed none of the special charters of rights that characterized towns in the West. Russian rulers considered towns their personal property, and Russian lords demanded the service and allegiance of townspeople.

The Emergence of Sovereign States

Although the term "state" was not yet being used to denote a political entity, by 1500 the largest monarchical kingdoms (see Map 1.2) were taking on some of the characteristics of the modern state. During the late fifteenth century, France, Spain, and England evolved into "new monarchies." What was "new" about them was their growing reach, an evolution begun

MAP 1.2 EUROPE IN 1500 Europe in 1500 was a maze of fragmented realms although sovereign monarchical states were beginning to emerge.



in the late medieval era. While monarchies grew stronger in Western Europe, however, they were actually weakened in Eastern and East Central Europe during the late Middle Ages. Struggles for power, civil war, and the growing domination of lords hindered the emergence of strong states there at least until the late sixteenth century.

Sovereign states emerged in Western Europe during the medieval period as rulers moved toward greater authority and independence. Yet, to be sure, these states were not "nation-states" in the modern sense, in which citizens feel that they belong to a nation by being, for example, Spanish, French, or Italian. Such national states, defined by ethnic bonds and cultural and linguistic traditions, would only develop beginning in the mid-eighteenth century and, above all, the nineteenth century. Medieval rulers governed a complex hodgepodge of territories, semi-independent towns, feudal vassals, and corporate institutions such as guilds that were largely independent of the crown, exchanging personal and/or corporate privileges for loyalty.

Between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, the kingdoms of France, England, and Spain grew into sovereign states as their rulers consolidated their territories by establishing their primacy over rivals. These rulers made laws and imposed administrative unity to a degree that was unprecedented. They asserted their authority, but not domination, over the nobles of the territories they claimed. Royal authority directly touched more subjects than ever before. Monarchs could raise and command armies, mint money, impose taxes, summon advisers, and appoint officials to represent and enforce their will.

The French kings, their territories clustered around Paris, had little real power during the medieval period. Until the mid-fifteenth century, the kings of England held Normandy, Brittany, Maine, Anjou, and Aquitaine, and the counts of Flanders held wealthy lands in what is now northern France and southern Belgium. During the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), French kings raised the funds and armies necessary to expel the English from France (with the exception of the Channel port of Calais). During the last half of the fifteenth century, the French kings ended the *de facto* independence of large, prosperous provinces that were technically fiefs of the crown. In 1482, France absorbed Burgundy, whose powerful dukes were related to the kings of France, and a decade later the regent for Charles VIII (ruled 1483–1498) invaded Brittany, adding it to France. Through timely royal marriages and warfare, the French monarchs established the foundations for a stronger, more centralized monarchy.

England, too, emerged as a stronger monarchical state during the late medieval period, but with significant differences from its continental counterparts. The vassals of King John (ruled 1199–1216) and the people of London rebelled against more taxes he imposed to finance his attempt to recover continental territories lost to France. In 1215, the king was forced to sign the Magna Carta, the "great Charter of Liberties." John agreed to



The seal of King John (1215) on the Magna Carta, a cornerstone of English common and constitutional law.

impose major taxes only with the permission of a "great council" that represented the barons and to cease hiring mercenaries when his barons refused to fight. Later in the century, King Edward I (ruled 1272–1307) summoned barons, bishops, and representatives from England's major towns in the hope of obtaining their agreement to provide funds for another war against the king of France. From that "parley," or "parliament," came the tradition in England of consultation with leading subjects and the origins of an English constitutional government that constrained royal authority. The division of Parliament into two houses, the House of Lords and the House of

Commons, which consisted of landed nobles and representatives of towns, developed during the reign of Edward III (ruled 1327–1377). Parliament's role as a representative institution increased as the king required new taxes to fight the Hundred Years' War against France. Parliament approved these levies.

In Central Europe, the Holy Roman Empire was not really a sovereign state. It dated from A.D. 962, the year when German nobles elected a ruler. By the end of the thirteenth century, the principle that the Holy Roman emperor would be elected, and not designated by heredity, had been established. Considering themselves the successors of the Roman Empire, the Holy Roman emperors saw themselves as the protectors of the papacy and of all Christendom. This involved the emperor in the stormy world of Italian politics.

The Holy Roman Empire encompassed about 300 semi-autonomous states, ranging from several large territories to a whole host of smaller states, principalities, and free cities that carried out their own foreign policy and fought wars. The emperor, selected by seven princes, could not consolidate his authority, levy taxes, raise armies or, increasingly, enforce his will outside of his own hereditary estates.

The Austrian Habsburgs, the ruling house in the German Alpine hereditary lands, had gradually extended their territories in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries between the Danube River, the Adriatic Sea, and the Little Carpathian Mountains in Eastern Europe. Beginning in 1438, when the first Habsburg was elected Holy Roman emperor, until 1740 (when the male line was extinguished), only Habsburgs held the title of Holy Roman emperor. Smaller states, such as the thirteen cantons of Switzerland, struggled to maintain their autonomy against rising Habsburg power.

Developing State Structures

The growth in the number of royal officials helped rulers consolidate more effective power. Rulers had always had some kind of advisory council, but the importance of their advisers grew in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Chanceries, treasuries, and courts of law represented an early stage of bureaucratization. Serving as royal officials, some humble men of talent began to reach positions of influence within states.

Rulers still earned revenue from their own lands. But in order to meet the expenses of their states, they drew income from taxation, the sale of offices (posts in the service of the monarch that were often both prestigious and lucrative) and government bonds, and the confiscation of land from recalcitrant nobles. Like other rulers, popes also centralized administration and finances, selling posts. Rulers imposed taxes on salt, wine, and other goods, impositions from which nobles and clergy were generally exempt. States in the sixteenth century became the great collectors and distributors of revenue. Moreover, the gradual growth of public debt was another sign of the increased authority of monarchical states. Royal dependency on the loans of merchant-bankers enriched the latter, providing more capital for their ventures. Rulers, surrounded by courtiers and councils, lived in a grander fashion. As they worked to consolidate their authority and territories, thrones became increasingly hereditary. As even wealthy people were apt to die young, such succession arrangements, which varied throughout Europe, mattered considerably.

With the strengthening of sovereign states in the fifteenth century, which entailed the loss of the right to have armies of retainers, nobles depended more on monarchies for the sanction of their power and honor. More of them came to court and served as royal officials. The sale of royal offices, especially in France and Spain, encouraged loyalty to the throne. Royal courts now adjudicated property disputes, gradually eroding noble jurisdiction over the king's subjects, although in France and many of the German states nobles retained rights of justice over peasants.

In the fifteenth century, regular channels for diplomacy emerged among the states of Europe. The Italian city-states were the first to exchange permanent resident ambassadors. By the middle of the century, Florence, Milan, Venice, and the kingdom of Naples all routinely exchanged ambassadors, who provided news and other information, while representing the interests of their states.

Limits to State Authority

Significant constraints, however, still limited the authority of rulers. We have seen that the privileges of towns, established through the purchase of royal charters of financial immunity, tempered royal power. Some regions (for example, Navarre in Spain), nominally incorporated into realms, maintained

autonomy through representative institutions. And, to be sure, distance and physical impediments such as mountains and vast plains also prevented the effective extension of royal authority.

Even more important was the tradition that assemblies of notable subjects had rights, including that of being consulted, as in the case of England cited above. In the thirteenth century, rulers had convoked assemblies of notable subjects to explain their policies and to ask for help. Because they depended on those whom they assembled to provide military assistance when they required it, they also heard grievances. From this, parliaments, assemblies, diets, and Estates developed, representing (depending on the place) nobles, clergy, towns, and, in several cases, commoners.

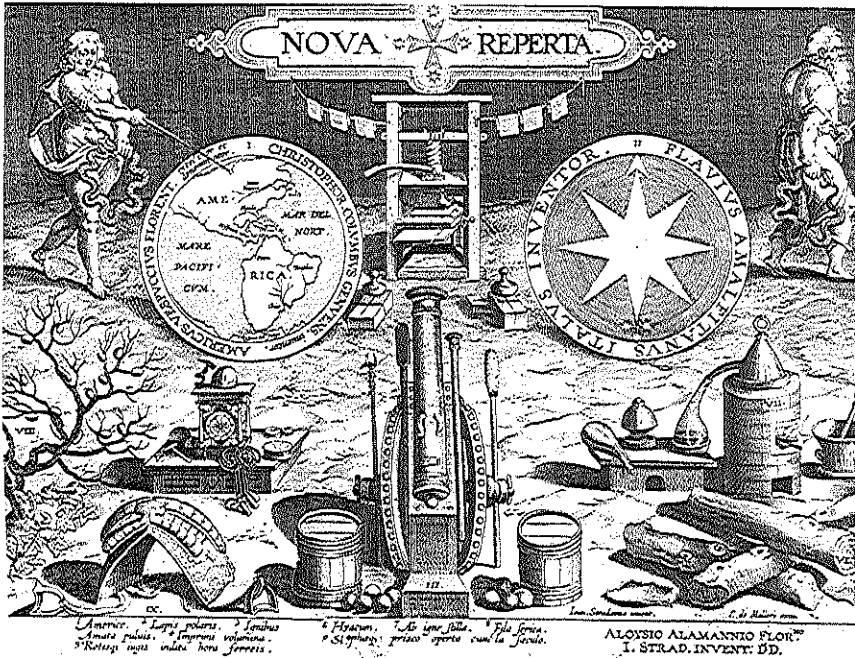
Early in the sixteenth century, an Italian exile told the king of France what the monarch would need to attack the duchy of Milan: "Three things are necessary: money; more money; and still more money." The most powerful states—France, Habsburg Austria, and Spain—could raise sizable armies with relative ease. But, to meet the extraordinary expenses of wartime, they increasingly borrowed money from wealthy banking families. Rulers also utilized subsidies from friendly powers, imposed special taxes and forced loans, and sold offices. Sixteenth-century inflation would make wars even more expensive.

Royal levies to finance warfare through direct taxation could only be imposed with the consent of those taxed, except peasants, who had limited rights. The dialogue between rulers and assemblies, and the strength and weakness of such representative bodies, over the centuries would define the emergence and nature of modern government in European states.

The princes of the German states had to ask assemblies of nobles for the right to collect excise taxes. In Poland-Lithuania and Hungary, noble assemblies were more important than royal authority. In Bohemia, the rights of towns partially balanced noble prerogatives. Rulers could suspend decisions of those "sovereign" bodies, yet such assemblies could not be completely ignored because rulers needed their support, or at least compliance, particularly in time of war.

The prerogatives of nobles and churchmen also impeded royal authority. They invariably resisted royal taxes, which fell on the poor—the vast majority of the population—whom no one represented. Nobles still had to be convinced or coerced to provide armies. Kings became, at least in principle, supreme judges (though not for the clergy, as ecclesiastics were generally tried in Church courts), with royal courts offering litigants and petitioners a final appeal.

The struggle between rulers and the popes dated to the late eleventh century, when the popes and Holy Roman emperors had struggled for primacy. During the "lay investiture crisis," which began in 1060, the popes had contested the right of lay rulers to appoint bishops and invest them with signs of spiritual authority, normally a staff and a ring. (The dispute ended in 1122 when Emperor Henry V relinquished the imperial claim to the power to



Theodore Galle's *Nova reperta* ("New discoveries") celebrates the discovery of the New World and forms of the new technology (gunpowder, the compass, the clock, the saddle with stirrups).

invest bishops with spiritual authority, and the pope recognized the emperor's right to give fiefs to the bishops once they had been consecrated, which left them with the status of vassals recognizing the lay authority of the emperor.) The clergy generally taught obedience to secular as well as ecclesiastical rulers. Furthermore, in the late medieval period, kings were able to further consolidate their power when popes granted the rulers of France, Spain, and some German towns certain rights over the clergy, including that of naming bishops.

TRANSFORMING DISCOVERIES

In the late Middle Ages, stunning developments in warfare and exploration transformed Europe and its relationship with the rest of the world. Moreover, the invention of printing created a culture of books, facilitating the spread of knowledge, ideas, and debate, at a time when exploration led to developing trade networks across the oceans, conquest, and empires.

Warfare became more pervasive in the early modern period because of dynastic quarrels between rulers as they sought to consolidate or increase their territories. Although kings still depended on nobles to raise armies and to command on the battlefield, the face of battle was revolutionized in the late medieval period. Invented in China, gunpowder was brought to Europe in the thirteenth century by the Arabs. Gunpowder moved warfare from "chiefly a matter of violent housekeeping" between lords and vassals to sometimes massive struggles between dynastic rivals. First used in battle in the early fourteenth century, gunpowder could propel arrows and, increasingly, lead bullets. Gunpowder soon became the explosive for early versions of rifles, or muskets, which could be standardized in caliber and ammunition and for which clockmakers could produce spring-driven wheel locks that functioned as firing mechanisms.

Gradually replacing the lance, sword, crossbow, and longbow in battle, the rifle eroded the role of the noble as a privileged warrior since heavily armored knights could now be more easily shot off their horses by guns than unseated by lances or brought down by arrows. This reduced the role of cavalry in battle. Cavalrymen now wore light armor, and, while they might well carry a lance, they also sometimes were armed with pistols. Pikemen, however, remained essential to any army; their thirteen-foot-long weapons, made of a long wooden pole topped by a sharp iron point, protected the infantry while soldiers reloaded. The furious attack of pikemen could tear apart the rows of riflemen as they knelt to reload.

Now exploding artillery shells could wound or kill many combatants at once. At the Battle of Novara (1513) in northern Italy, where Swiss soldiers defeated a French army, artillery fire killed 700 men in three minutes. Deadly bombardments during battles had a devastating effect on the morale of the enemy. Naval battles grew fiercer as cannon replaced rams on warships. The sleek galleys that raced along the coast of the Mediterranean during the warm summer months gave way to ships large enough to transport heavy cannon. The threat from enemy artillery forced the construction of massive fortifications around towns, which left the defense with a solid advantage in warfare. Sieges lasted longer than ever before. Victorious armies, frustrated by lengthy sieges, sometimes slaughtered the surviving civilian population.

Although frontier garrisons, artillery units, and the king's household guards were virtually the only true standing armies, their size increased during the wars of the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. During the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), major battles were fought with between 7,000 and 15,000 soldiers on each side. During the struggles between the Austrian Habsburg and French Valois dynasties on the Italian peninsula in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, armies reached 25,000 men in size. Some nobles still had private armies but served their kings as commanders and cavalrymen.

Mercenaries, the original “free lances,” increasingly replaced feudal levies (and urban militias, where they existed) in armies mobilized by rulers to defend or expand their territorial interests. These might include Albanians, Englishmen, Scots, Greeks, Poles, and Swiss pikemen. Mercenaries received modest, though irregular, pay and expected acceptable rations and the opportunity to pillage the towns they conquered. Assuming these conditions were met, they seem to have deserted far less frequently than soldiers recruited by states from their own populations.

Yet most states had some kind of conscription, whether a formalized draft of men between the ages of fifteen and sixty or a hasty roundup when war approached. Loyal nobles, royal officials, and paid recruiters provided soldiers. Peasants made up more than three-quarters of armies, as they did the European population. Criminals also ended up in armies, often as the price of their release from prison or from execution, though they might well carry with them forever a branded letter as part of their sentence (such as the letter “V” for the French word *voleur*—thief).

Conditions of military service were difficult at best. In addition to barely adequate lodging and food, infractions of rules were dealt with harshly, including the infamous and often fatal “running the gauntlet” through troops lined up on both sides, dispensing blows with sticks or swords. Officers dispensed justice without trial or appeal, and sentences were carried out immediately. The severed heads of deserters or other serious offenders were impaled on pikes for several days at the entrance to a camp, sending a clear message.

Except for royal guards, artillery units, and other specialized forces, uniforms were rare in any army, although most soldiers sported some type of identification, such as an armband or a tunic bearing a national or regional symbol like the English red cross, the barred cross of Lorraine, or the lion of Lyon.

Epidemics and disease—dysentery and typhoid, among others—carried off far more than did wounds received in battle. But casualty figures were also alarming, however inaccurately kept. The wounded often died from inadequate—even for the time—medical treatment and from neglect.

The Printing Press and the Power of the Printed Word

The advent of printing in Europe in the fifteenth century in some ways marked the end of the medieval period. The invention of woodblock printing and paper had occurred in China in the eighth century; both reached Europe from the Arab world via Spain in the thirteenth century. Before the arrival of these technologies, monks and scribes had copied books on parchment sheets; a single copy of the Bible required about 170 calfskins or 300 sheepskins. Because it was much cheaper than parchment, paper more readily accommodated scholars, officials, and merchants. But the process of copying itself remained slow. Cosimo de' Medici, the Florentine banker and

patron of Renaissance art, hired 200 scribes to copy 200 volumes in two years' time.

All this changed in the fifteenth century when Flemish craftsmen invented a kind of oil-based ink. This and the innovation of a wooden hand press made possible the invention of movable metal type in the German cathedral town of Mainz in about 1450 by, among several others, Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1395–1468). His stunningly beautiful Latin Bibles are treasured today. Printing shops soon started up in the Italian states, Bohemia, France, and the Netherlands, and in Spain and England by the 1470s (see Map 1.3). By 1500, about 35,000 books were published each year in Europe, and a century later the number had jumped to between 150,000 and 200,000 books.

Books provided scholars with identical ancient and medieval texts to discuss and critique. Accounts of discoveries and adventures in the New World filtered across Europe from Spain, England, and France. The number of scholarly libraries—which were really just private collections—grew rapidly. New professions developed: librarians, booksellers, publishers, typesetters,

MAP 1.3 SPREAD OF PRINTING THROUGH EUROPE, 1450–1508 Towns and dates at which printing shops were established throughout Europe.



and editors. Moreover, with the greater dissemination of knowledge came an increase in the number of universities, rising from twenty in 1300 to about seventy in 1500.

More people learned how to read, although literate individuals remained far in the minority. In Florence and other prosperous cities, the rate of literacy may have been relatively high, although in the Italian city-states as a whole it is unlikely that more than 1 percent of workers and peasants could read and write. The literate population of the German states in 1500 was about 3 or 4 percent. But among the upper classes many more people developed the habit of reading.

Not all that was published pleased lay and ecclesiastic leaders, and printing made censorship considerably more difficult. No longer could the destruction of one or two manuscripts hope to root out an idea. Thus, Pope Alexander VI warned in a bull in 1501: "The art of printing is very useful insofar as it furthers the circulation of useful and tested books; but it can be very harmful if it is permitted to widen the influence of pernicious works. It will therefore be necessary to maintain full control over the printers."

Exploration and Conquest in the New World: The Origins of European Empire

By the last decade of the fifteenth century, the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula already had several centuries of navigational and sailing accomplishments behind them. The Portuguese, who had the advantage of the magnificent port of Lisbon, had captured a foothold on the Moroccan coast in 1415, beginning two centuries of expansion. Early in the fifteenth century, they began to explore the west coast of Africa and had taken Madeira and the Azores islands in the Atlantic. Their goal was to break Muslim and Venetian control of European access to Asian spices and silk.

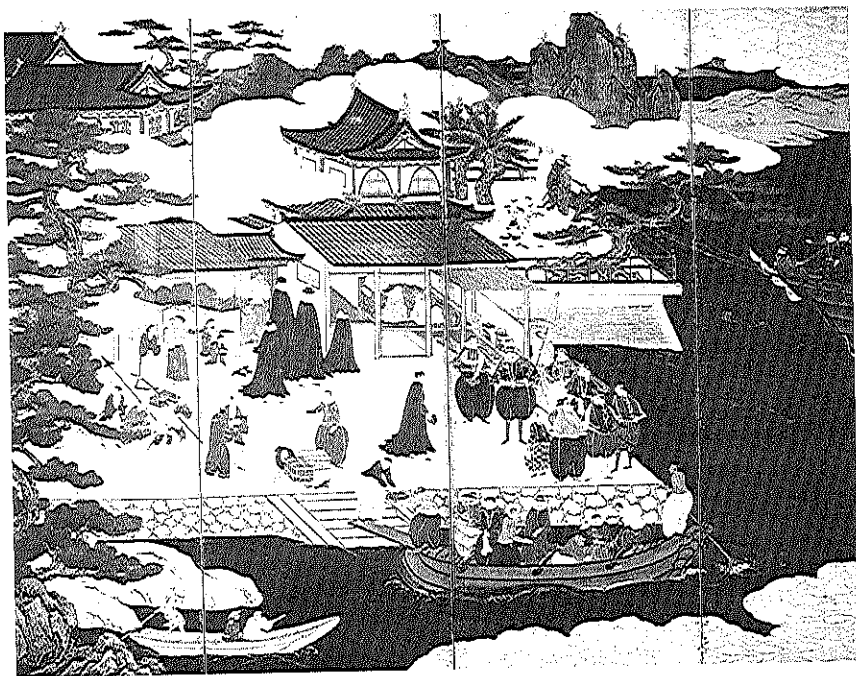
King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain initially rejected the request of the Genoese cartographer and merchant Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), who sought financial backing for an ocean voyage to reach the Indies. In 1492, however, fearing that Portuguese vessels might be the first to reach the wealth of Asia by sea, the royal couple consented to support the expedition.

Late in 1492, Columbus set sail with three ships. He believed the earth was a perfect sphere, and since Africa stood in the way of a voyage sailing to the east, he thought it possible to reach the Orient by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean, which he believed to be narrow. After more than nine weeks on the open seas, the small fleet reached not Asia but rather the small Caribbean island of San Salvador in the Americas. He then came ashore in Cuba and finally Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti). "What on earth have you come seeking so far away?" he was asked. "Christians and spices," he replied. But he also probably believed that he would find gold, and asked the Indians he encountered on the shore in sign

language if they knew where some could be found. Columbus was impressed with the beauty of Hispaniola (although he remained convinced that he had discovered islands near India) and the “docility” of the indigenous people. Yet, in the absence of gold, he suggested that the Spanish crown could make Hispaniola profitable by selling its people as slaves, a looming tragedy. Columbus, whose greatest contribution was to find a way across the sea using the trade winds, made three subsequent voyages of discovery, the last beginning in 1502, after which he gave up his search for a passage to Asia.

Portugal, a much poorer state than Spain, struggled to defend its trade routes against Spanish encroachments. In 1487 Bartholomew Dias (c. 1450–1500) first rounded the Cape of Good Hope, the southern tip of Africa, reaching the Indian Ocean, and then Calcutta on the southwest coast of India. The cargo of spices the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama (c. 1460–1524) brought back to Lisbon from India in 1498 paid for his costly expedition sixty times over. The Portuguese established fortified bases along the Indian Ocean, including at Goa. The maritime route across the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea could now compete with the overland spice and silk routes that had long linked Europe to the markets of the East. However, the Portuguese found that a thriving maritime trade network

Portuguese, wearing Western attire, meeting robed Japanese upon disembarking in 1542.



already existed between China, Japan, Southeast Asia, India, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa. The European trading presence was new. An Indonesian ruler remarked of the Portuguese adventurers, "The fact that these people journey so far from home to conquer territory indicates clearly that there must be very little justice and a great deal of greed among them." This had made them "fly all over the waters in order to acquire possessions that God did not give them."

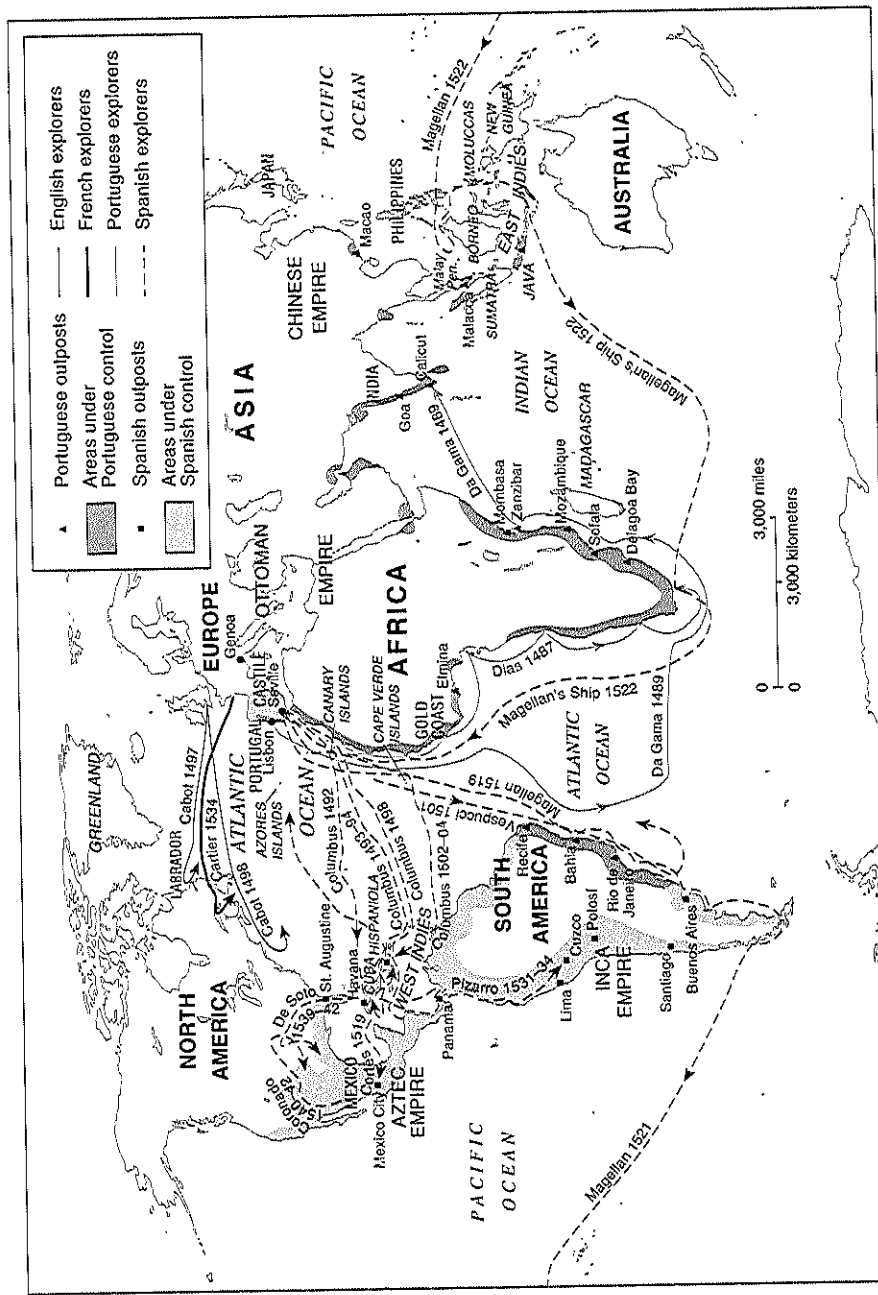
In 1493, Pope Alexander VI divided the non-Christian world into zones for Spanish and Portuguese exploration and exploitation (see Map 1.4). His proclamation seemed to justify conquests, as well as the conversion of indigenous peoples. He awarded Portugal all of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia; Spain, the pope's ally, received most of the Americas. Portugal claimed Brazil, which became the largest colony in the Americas, established in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Soon more and more Spanish explorers reached the Americas. Vasco Núñez de Balboa (c. 1475–1519) established Spanish sovereignty over what is now Panama. Cuba, in turn, fell, and then served as a staging point for the conquest of Mexico by Hernando Cortés (1485–1547), which opened a new chapter in European expansion. Cortés, who first crossed the Atlantic in 1506 to Hispaniola, landed on the coast of Mexico in 1519. He went to see the Aztec ruler, Montezuma. The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán (present-day Mexico City) was then larger than any other European city except Constantinople. Montezuma sent him away, although he later sent him gifts of gold and silver. Despite the fact that he had been ordered to limit his expedition to exploration and trade, Cortés was determined to conquer Mexico in the name of Emperor Charles V. The interests of the Spanish crown would remain paramount in the construction of Spain's overseas empire. Cortés formed alliances with Montezuma's non-Aztec peoples, who naively hoped that Cortés might help them achieve independence. The Spanish adventurer then conquered Mexico with no more than sixteen horses and six hundred soldiers, with the help of his Native American allies.

Farther south, Francisco Pizarro (c. 1476–1541) led his men in the conquest of the Inca Empire in Peru. Although the Incas were a people rich in precious metals and culture, they had never seen iron or steel weapons before, nor did they have draft animals. When Pizarro's horses lost their shoes in Peru and there was no iron available to replace them, he had them shod in silver. In the 1540s more silver was discovered in Mexico, and also in the Andes Mountains, completely transforming the economy of Spanish conquest. Imported silver enhanced the integration of the Spanish Empire into the expanding trade of Europe.

The victory of the conquistadors (conquerors) was the victory of steel-bladed swords over stone-bladed swords. Moreover, the surprise element of cannon contributed to the Spanish victory in the Americas and of the Portuguese in Southeast Asia. A witness to a Portuguese attack in 1511

MAP 1.4 EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST, 1492–1542 Pope Alexander VI divided the non-Christian world into zones for Spanish and Portuguese exploration and exploitation. Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English explorers set out to find new routes to Asia, the New World, and around the world.





27.

Aztec emissaries agreeing to a treaty with Cortés, who is seated with his interpreter standing to his left.

remembered, "the noise of the cannon was as the noise of thunder in the heavens and the flashes of fire of their guns were like flashes of lightning in the sky: and the noise of their matchlocks was like that of ground-nuts popping in the frying-pan."

Steeped in tales of crusading chivalry and conquest, the conquerors set out looking for adventure and wealth. Cortés, for example, was of a modest Castilian noble family; his father had fought against the Moors in southern Spain, and thus was himself a veteran of another imperial conquest, the Reconquista, which had expelled the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula. "We came here to serve God and the king," said one Spaniard in the Americas, "but also to get rich." Most died young, far from home, their dreams of wealth shattered by the harsh realities of life in what seemed to them a strange and often inhospitable world. Ferdinand Magellan (c. 1480–1521), the Portuguese-born explorer, was killed by angry islanders on a Pacific beach. His crew nonetheless circumnavigated the globe, having proven that a southwest passage to India did exist, returning to Spain in 1522.

Many of the conquistadors, and many of the later settlers (mostly men) who were attracted by tales of gold and silver, died in the New World; during the first ten years of Spanish settlement of Hispaniola, as much as

two-thirds of the European population perished. However, many times more of the native people they encountered perished as a result of contact with the newcomers. The smallpox the Spanish brought with them wiped out people who had no immunity to diseases brought from Europe. The indigenous population of Mexico fell from about 25 million—or more—in 1520 to perhaps as few as 1 million in 1600. The native population of Peru fell from about 7 million in 1500 to half a million in 1600. Other European diseases, including measles, typhus, and bubonic plague, decimated the native population. In Guatemala, a Mayan Indian kept a chronicle of the ravages of European disease among his people: “Great was the stench of the dead. After our fathers and grandfathers succumbed, half of the people fled to the fields. The dogs and vultures devoured the bodies. . . . We were born to die.” In turn, the Indians gave the Spanish syphilis, which then spread in Europe.

The exchange of diseases was a tragic consequence of the meeting between the Old and New Worlds, but there were beneficial exchanges as well. Before the arrival of Europeans, there were no domesticated animals larger than the llama and alpaca in the Americas, and little animal protein in the Indian diet. Spaniards brought horses and cattle with them. Sheep had accompanied Columbus on his second journey. The 350 pigs brought to Cuba by Columbus had multiplied to over 30,000 by 1514. They provided manure for farming but ate their way through forest land and eroded the indigenous agricultural terrace system, upsetting the ecological balance of conquered lands.

Every year the Spanish galleons returned with tobacco, potatoes, new varieties of beans, cacao, chili peppers, and tomatoes. These crops contributed to an increase in the European population. Maize fed European farm animals. In turn, the Spaniards planted wheat, barley, rice, and oats in their colonies.

In 1565, a Spanish galleon completed a voyage of global trade by sailing across the Pacific Ocean from Manila to unload cinnamon on the coast of Mexico. Spanish ships returned with silver, which could purchase silks, porcelain, spices, jade, and mother-of-pearl brought by Chinese junks to the Philippines. Shipping routes led from Seville to the Caribbean and to the ports of Veracruz in Mexico and Cartagena in Colombia. They returned with Mexican and Peruvian silver that replenished the coffers of European princes and merchants. All five continents—Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, and South America—thus moved closer together in reciprocal economic relationships that represented the beginnings of a globalization of trade.

The Spanish sought not only trade with the Americas but also empire. Spanish legal documents affecting the new colonies declared that Indians would keep all lands they already held, but that all other territories henceforth belonged either to the crowns of Spain or were to be divided up among the conquerors as booty. The Spanish proclaimed the *requerim-*

iento, which required that Indians accept both Spanish rule and Christianity. The conquistadors built new towns, placing the church, town hall, and prison around a central marketplace (*plaza*), as towns developed on a rectangular grid plan.

In return for the pope's blessing of the colonial enterprise, missionaries began to arrive in the Americas, hoping to convert the Indians to Christianity. The harsh reality of the colonial experience for the natives, however, was largely untempered by the good intentions of some, but not all, of the missionaries. "For this kind of people," snapped a Portuguese priest in Brazil in 1563, "there is no better way of preaching than the sword and the rod of iron." A Spanish judge in Mexico said of his people that they "compelled [the Indians] to give whatever they asked, and inflicted unheard-of cruelties and tortures upon them."

Spaniards, Portuguese, and other Europeans sought to impose their culture on the peoples they conquered, although Christian teaching made only limited headway in India and virtually none in China. Unlike its view of Muslims, the Church did not consider Indians infidels, but rather as innocents who could be taught Christian beliefs. "Are these Indians not men?" asked a Dominican priest in Santo Domingo in a sermon to shocked colonists in 1511, "Do they not have rational souls? Are you not obliged to love them as you love yourselves?" A papal pronouncement depicted the Indians as "true men . . . capable not only of understanding the Catholic faith, but also, according to our information, desirous of receiving it." The Spaniards already had experience in dealing with the diversity of language and culture on the Iberian Peninsula, although nothing like what they found in the Americas. In the 1590s, a Franciscan friar boasted that he had built over 200 churches and baptized more than 70,000 Indians. In Latin America, Christian belief sometimes merged with local religious deities, customs, and shrines to create a distinctive form of Christianity.

Obligatory labor service, brutally enforced, first formed the relationship between rulers and the ruled. The crown of Castile established a system of *encomienda*, by which Spanish settlers would hold Indians "in trust," but not their lands. They could exact tribute in kind or labor. The system gradually ended and a wage system—not much better—came into place. Moreover, *repartimiento* allowed royal officials to force Indians to work for specific periods. In Central America, Spanish colonists invoked the medieval Christian concept of a "just war" against "heathens" as a justification for enslavement.

The Church and the crown periodically tried to protect the Indians against the harsh treatment accorded them by many of their Spanish countrymen in the name of profit. Bishop Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566), whose father had accompanied Columbus on his second voyage to the Americas and who had himself been a conquistador before becoming a priest, spoke out against the treatment of Indians. He saluted the "marvelous government, laws, and good customs" of the Mayas of Central America, whom

he wanted placed under the authority of the Church. Charles V ordered a pause in Spanish conquests until such moral issues could be considered, but the Spanish destruction of what they considered pagan temples and idols continued and the empire continued to expand.

As the Indian population was depleted through disease, overwork, and brutality, the Spanish looked for new sources of labor. Domestic slavery still existed in Italy, Spain, and Muscovy in the sixteenth century, as well as in the Arab world, and some Indians in the New World also had slaves. By the fifteenth century, Portuguese traders along the coast of West Africa had begun to make profits selling Africans as servants in Lisbon or as sugar plantation workers in the Portuguese Atlantic islands. Portugal soon dominated the African network of slave-trading, which depended on chieftains and traders in African kingdoms, merchants in Seville and Lisbon, settlers in Mexico and Peru, and Brazilian sugar growers. The Spaniards believed that Africans could best survive the brutally difficult work and hot climate of America. Between 1595 and 1640 about 300,000 slaves were transported to the Spanish colonies in the Americas, and five times that many would be shipped during the next century.

Gradually, more Spanish settlers arrived to populate the American colonies, including small traders, shoemakers, blacksmiths, and masons. (In Paraguay, the governor asked that no lawyers be allowed to emigrate, "because in newly settled countries they encourage dissension and litigation.") By the mid-sixteenth century about 150,000 Spaniards had crossed to America, and by the end of the century about 240,000 Spaniards had emigrated there. Most never returned to Spain.

In 1552, a Spanish official wrote King Charles V (ruled 1516–1556, Holy Roman emperor 1519–1558) that the discovery of the East and West Indies was "the greatest event since the creation of the world, apart from the incarnation and death of Him who created it." But Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), a French writer who had met Indians brought back from Brazil, offered another view in 1588, when he observed that "so many goodly cities [were] ransacked and razed; so many nations destroyed and made desolate; so infinite millions of harmless peoples of all sexes, states, and ages, massacred, ravaged and put to the sword . . . ruined and defaced for the traffic of pearls and pepper."

CONCLUSION

The economic and political structures of early modern Europe drew on the dynamism of the medieval period. Demographic vitality finally overcame the catastrophic losses brought by the Black Death. Within Europe, commerce and manufacturing expanded. Mediterranean traders roamed as far as the Middle East and even Asia. And although much of Central Europe and the Italian peninsula remained a hodgepodge of small states, rulers in

France, England, and Spain had consolidated their authority, and sovereign monarchical states began to emerge.

Above all, three salient movements of change brought the Middle Ages to an end. The first was the Renaissance, or cultural rebirth, which began in the mid-fourteenth century in the Italian city-states (see Chapter 2). The commercial prosperity of Florence, above all, but also of Venice and other independent city-states made possible this period of extraordinary accomplishment in literature and painting. The invention of printing began to transform one culture after another. Second, the exploration and colonization of the New World would ultimately help end the Mediterranean Sea's role as the center of European prosperity and would lead to Spain's emergence as a world power, along with England and the Netherlands (see Chapters 5 and 6). Colonization brought the establishment of European empires abroad; between 1500 and the late eighteenth century, more than 1.5 million Europeans crossed the ocean to live in the New World. Third, the Reformation (see Chapter 3), which began in the second decade of the sixteenth century, challenged the unity of the Roman Catholic Church and its dominance in much of Europe.

THE RENAISSANCE



In 1508, Pope Julius II summoned Michelangelo from Florence to the papal city of Rome. He commissioned the artist to paint frescoes (paintings on plaster) on the ceiling of the new Sistine Chapel, a ceremonial chapel next to the papal residence in the Vatican. With some reluctance (since he considered himself primarily a sculptor), Michelangelo agreed to undertake the project. He signed a contract that stipulated a payment of 3,000 ducats and began work that very day in May.

During the long, difficult years of intense creativity, Michelangelo often lay on his back, staring at the ceiling (still the best position from which to study his masterpiece), before climbing up the scaffolding to work. His frescoes, depicting Creation, Original Sin, the Flood, and the ancestors of Christ, are a triumph of religious painting. However, Pope Julius II, offended by the nude figures in the *Last Judgment* frescoes, ordered painters to cover the nudes with fig leaves. As a result, Michelangelo left Rome in disgust. He left behind what is arguably the most beautiful pictorial ensemble in Western painting.

Michelangelo's work represents the epitome of art during the Renaissance, a time of cultural rebirth. From about 1330 to 1530, the city-states of the Italian peninsula emerged as the intellectual and artistic centers of Europe. It was a period during which classical texts were rediscovered, thereby reviving the ideas, architecture, arts, and values of ancient Greece and Rome. By celebrating the beauty of nature and the dignity of mankind, Renaissance artists and scholars helped shape the intellectual and cultural history of the modern world. During the fifteenth century, Michelangelo, as well as Leonardo da Vinci and many other Renaissance sculptors and painters, enjoyed the patronage of wealthy families and produced some of the immortal works of the European experience. From about 1490 to 1530, Rome, too, was the center of a final period of artistic innovation, the High Renaissance, during which time the popes, including Julius II, commissioned paintings, sculptures, and churches.

Yet, weakened by internal political turmoil, the Italian city-states were ravaged by foreign invaders beginning in 1494. Unable to resist French invasion and then Spanish domination, after 1530 the city-states were no