

Middle Ages in Europe (476-1400s)

Invasions of Western Europe

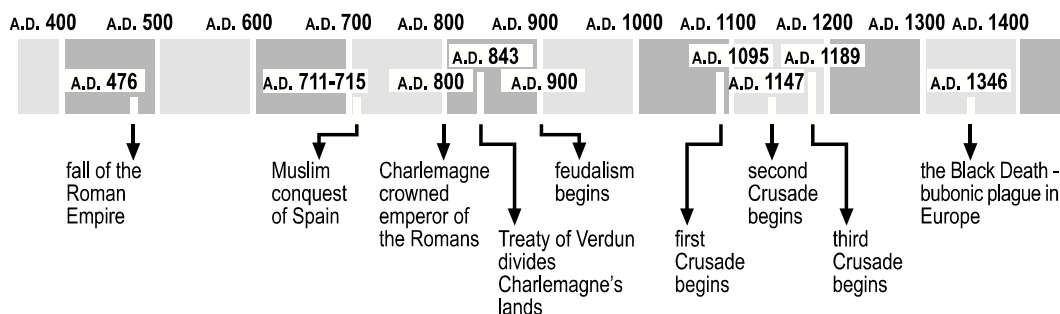
The period from the fall of Rome in A.D. 476 through the 500 or so years that followed is known as the *early Middle Ages*. This period is characterized by a series of **invasions**, each more destructive than the one before. Western European cities were destroyed. Violent and criminal behavior affected almost everyone. Valuable art was stolen. Rome, which at one time had a **population** of over one million, had a population of less than 50,000 by the end of the fifth century.

During the period of these invasions, learning and education became less important. People could not and would not travel because they were scared. Trade nearly stopped. Sea travel was dangerous because pirates sailed in search of treasure. It was not uncommon for towns to disappear after a tribe attacked.

The only organized group which tried to maintain some order was the Roman Catholic Church. This was not an easy task. Fortunately, the Church had some strong-willed popes who were eventually able to convince some leaders of the various tribes to settle down. In fact, many tribal leaders were **converted** to Christianity. Clovis, a great early leader of the Franks, became a Christian, for example.

The most powerful tribes came from present-day Germany. The Germanic tribes **migrated** westward and southward. By the end of the fifth century, two Germanic tribes, the Angles and Saxons, ruled in England. The Franks ruled in what is now France. The Ostrogoths and the Lombards held northern Italy.

Timeline of the Middle Ages in Europe



The Franks

In A.D. 732, a leader of the Franks named Charles Martel, which means Charles the Hammer, defeated the Islamic invaders in France in what was called the *Battle of Tours*—one of the most important events in the history of Europe. By defeating the Muslims and driving them back to Spain, Charles Martel saved the Roman Catholic Church in Europe. Perhaps today, Western Europe would be another Islamic region if Charles Martel had not won.

The son of Charles Martel, Pepin the Short, became the first King of the Franks. He defeated the Lombards in northern Italy. Pepin gave the captured lands to the pope in Italy. This was very important for the history of the church. With **protection** from the Franks, the pope was able to begin rule over a territory in Italy known as the *Papal States*. In addition, Byzantine and Islamic **influence** in Italy began to decline. At the same time, the power of the Roman Catholic Church began to grow.

Charlemagne



Charlemagne gave the people of Western Europe the wisest government since the days of the Roman Empire.

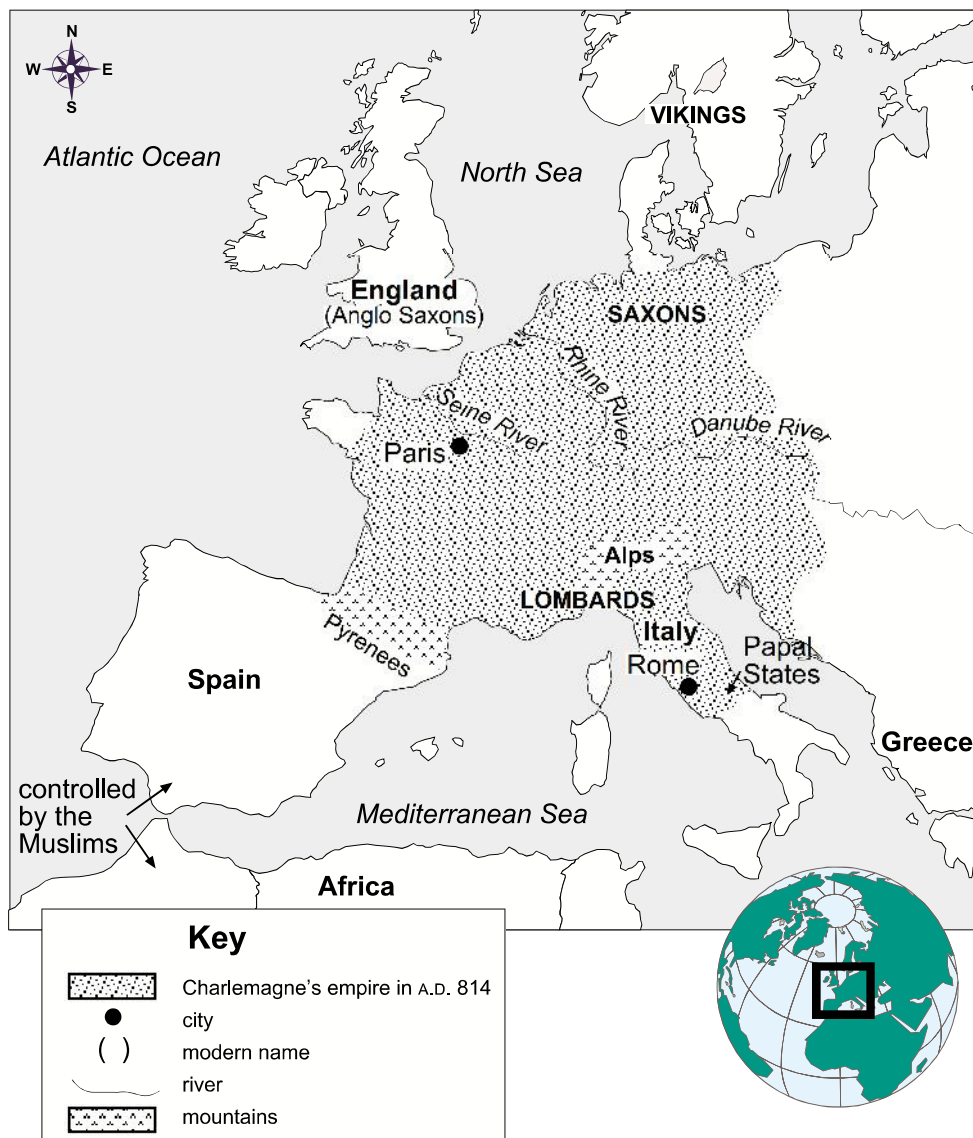
Pepin the Short had a son named Charlemagne, which means Charles the Great, who conquered more lands throughout Italy and present-day Germany. He remained friendly with the pope and was a devout Christian. Charlemagne tried to throw the Muslims out of Spain, but he failed. He did, however, gain control of much of central Europe.

On Christmas Day, A.D. 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne the emperor of Rome. Charlemagne's empire was culturally much more Germanic than Roman.

Unlike most of the barbaric rulers of his age, Charlemagne enjoyed learning. He was also skilled at holding his empire together. This was no easy task. Charlemagne traveled his lands, maintaining his empire. He was helped by inspectors who reported on the conditions of the empire each year.

After Charlemagne's death in A.D. 814, his sons were unable to hold his empire together. Rich landowners and generals now took power. A new era known as the age of **feudalism** was about to begin in Europe.

The breakup of Charlemagne's empire happened as a result of the Treaty of Verdun, signed by his three grandsons in A.D. 843. The empire was divided into the East Frankish Kingdom under Lothair, the Central Kingdom under Louis the German, and the West Frankish Kingdom ruled by Charles the Bald.



Charlemagne's Empire, A.D. 814



Charlemagne's Empire after Treaty of Verdun, A.D. 843

Early Middle Ages

Historians generally agree that the early Middle Ages lasted about 500 years, from the fall of Rome in A.D. 476 to around the end of the 10th century. Because it was a period of history characterized by a **decline** in the civilization of Western Europe, it is sometimes called the *Dark Ages*. From the early Middle Ages, historians agree that Western Europe passed into the late Middle Ages. The late Middle Ages lasted about 300 years.

During the first period of the Middle Ages, the population of Western Europe declined. This was mostly due to the continuous fighting among the tribes in Western Europe such as the Huns, Lombards, Gauls, Franks, Saxons, and Ostrogoths. To add to its problems, Europe was invaded from the north by Scandinavian tribes called *Vikings*. From the east, Europe was invaded by Hungarian tribes called *Magyars*, and from the south, by Muslims.

Another reason for the decline in population was the spread of disease. Unlike the Romans, who believed in bathing and cleanliness, the barbarian tribes did not. **Unsanitary** living caused the spread of disease, and the death rate climbed.

Except for the brief period of Charlemagne's empire, the tribes of Western Europe were unable to **unite**. Unity brings strength. From strength comes strong defense. With a strong defense, the Western Europeans would probably have been able to defeat the Vikings, Magyars, and Muslims.

The Feudal System

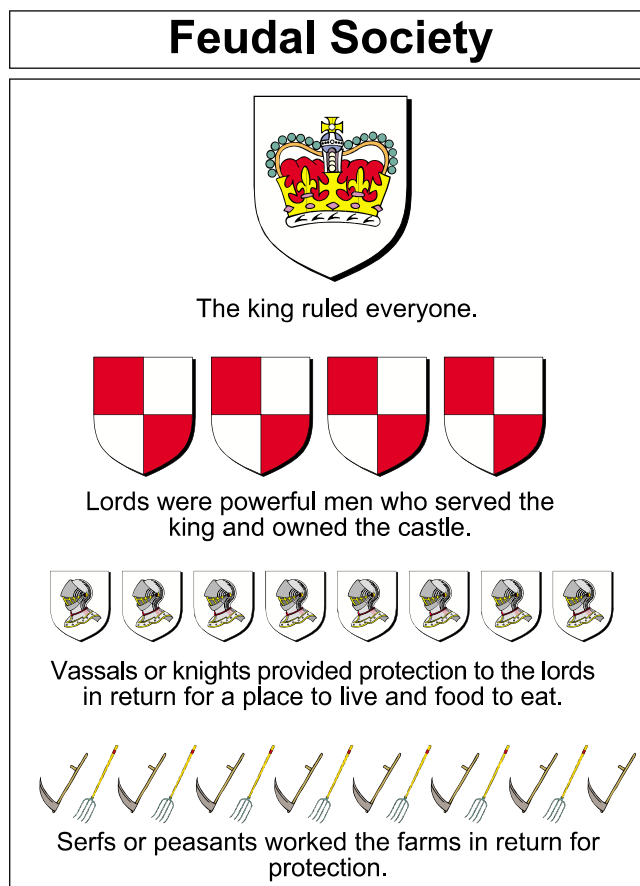
Castles were built for protection during this time. Around the castles were high walls. Usually a **moat** was built around the outside of the castle, and nearby was farmland. Peasants, called **serfs**, worked the farms. They gave a share of their produce to their leader, who was called the **lord**. In return, the peasants were given protection within the walls in case of attack. For defense of the castle, the lord hired **professional** soldiers



Castles usually had high walls and a moat around the outside for protection.

called knights or vassals. In return for defending the castle, the knights were given a place to live and food to eat. A lord also could grant his **vassal** a **fief**, or estate, that could range from a few acres to hundreds of square miles in exchange for service or loyalty.

The area on which the castle and farmland were located was called the **manor**. The entire manor consisted of a manor house and land farmed by the serfs. People on the manor needed no outside assistance for support. All the necessities of life, like food, clothing, and shelter, were provided. The manor's **political** and **economic** system of lord, vassal, and serf became known as the **feudal system**. In certain areas, powerful lords became kings.



The diagram above illustrates the feudal system. Start at the bottom or the base. The higher one's position, the more powerful one becomes.

Under the feudal system it was difficult, if not impossible, for people to rise above their place in life. A serf's children would be serfs. Because feudalism required that all vassals swore allegiance to their lords and all lords swore allegiance to their king, the feudal system was one of **social**, economic, and political dependence.

Everyday Life under Feudalism

What was everyday life like during the early Middle Ages? When Charlemagne's empire was divided, public road building stopped. Bridges were not kept in good condition. Most of the people were insecure. All of this was a direct result of the constant warfare. Communication among the various manors almost stopped, and there was little trade among them because of the danger of traveling. There was almost no education. Many people, including the leaders, were **illiterate**.

The Church during the Middle Ages

In order to fully understand the entire feudal age, it is important to recognize the role the Church played during this period.



The Roman Catholic Church also participated in the feudal system. The only teaching that occurred during the entire Middle Ages was through the Church. **Monks** formed study groups. They copied records and reports. The Church also owned manors just like the lords. Serfs worked the land, and vassals fought to protect it.

For the common people, the Church of the Middle Ages represented a place to escape from the **turmoil** of their everyday lives. It gave to those who needed it a **sanctuary**, or safe place. The Church taught people to work hard, remain peaceful, and accept their roles in life. The Church taught that if you obeyed its religious teachings, you would go to heaven. Those who disobeyed the church were **excommunicated**, or cut off from the church.

Late Middle Ages

As the invasions into Western Europe ended, life began to change. The feudal system was well in place. The Church had established itself as the most important part of the lives of the people. The most powerful lords became kings.

A direct result of the end of the invasions was an increase in population and trade. With the increase in population, came the rise of cities and towns. A new class of people, called *merchants*, appeared. Goods were traded from city to city.

Within the cities, **guilds** appeared. A guild is a system in which a person learns a trade as in unions today. Some guilds were composed of merchants, traders, and crafts workers. The middle class, or **bourgeoisie**, emerged as an important group.

Communication increased between cities and towns because of safer travel. Trade with the Islamic and Byzantine empires improved. Along with new goods, new ideas were introduced into Western Europe.

Throughout this period, however, the poor remained poor, although the serfs were now freer to move from place to place. Lords of manors realized that it was cheaper to give land to the serfs in return for rent than to force serfs to work land in return for food and shelter.

The political authority of the Church also increased. Now, both the pope and kings were gaining more power. The Church of the late Middle Ages improved the education of the people.

Learning also improved when universities were formed. One of the first universities was established in Bologna, Italy around 1158. Achievements were made in literature, history, science, and other educational subjects during the late Middle Ages.

In summary, the late Middle Ages saw the return of town life and an increase in trade and communication, as well as the gradual decline of the manor system. Education, especially through the Church, contributed to this changing face of Europe.



The Crusades

The word *crusade* means *marked with the cross*. The cross is the symbol of the church. So the Crusades, or holy wars, were a call by the Roman Catholic Church to the people of Western Europe to take up arms and fight a religious war to free the Holy Land from the Seljuk Turks, a Muslim people from Central Asia. The call was officially made by the pope in Rome.

In the late A.D. 1000s, the Seljuk Turks took control of Jerusalem and closed the city to Christians. The Seljuk Turks also threatened the Byzantine Empire city of Constantinople. Because of this threat, the Byzantine emperor appealed to the Roman Catholic Church for military aid. The emperor also reported that Christians in Palestine were being persecuted by the Muslims.



Crusader

In the year 1095, Pope Urban II called the leaders of Western Europe to a meeting. He told them that they must join with him to recapture Jerusalem, the holy city of Christianity, from the Muslims. The Church promised Crusaders land and forgiveness for their sins. The leaders agreed. The First Crusade began in 1096. By 1099, the Crusaders from Western Europe had recaptured Jerusalem and carved out four Christian states in the Middle East. Western Europeans were extremely happy. They won! What the Western Europeans did not understand was that at the time of the First Crusade, the Muslims were already fighting against each other and were not prepared to defend themselves against the Christians. However, in about 50 years, the Muslims had recaptured some of the land held by the Christians. This led to other Crusades to conquer the Holy Land, or Palestine.

The Crusades continued for about 200 years altogether (see Unit 13). Each time different kings of Europe answered the pope's call with large armies. Many kings would send their political enemies on the crusades to get rid of them. However, all the later Crusades failed, and the Holy Land was again controlled by the Muslims.


Impact of the Crusades

The results of the Crusades were very important to the history of Western Europe. The Crusades

- improved trade
- strengthened the power of kings
- further weakened the feudal system, especially serfdom
- encouraged learning, enriched culture, and spread knowledge
- helped make the Church the most important part of Western European civilization
- showed the world that even though the people of Europe might disagree over politics, they agreed on their support of the Church and Christianity



Overall, the period known as the *Middle Ages* was a time of change for Western Europe. It was a time in history which acted like a bridge between the Ancient World and the Modern World.

Comparison of the Early and Late Middle Ages

	Early Middle Ages A.D. 500-1000	Late Middle Ages A.D. 1000-1400
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • barbarian tribal leaders • Charlemagne's Empire • unwritten laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feudal System in place; each person owes allegiance to the lord of the manor and the king
Church and Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church (Roman Catholic) unable to control the invasion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • powerful Church • people look to the Church for hope
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • many tribes in conflict with each other • slaves or serfs live at the mercy of their masters • people were frightened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feudalism: 1) king, 2) lord, 3) vassal, 4) serf • towns and cities grow in number; middle class grows
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • declining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-contained within the manor • much bartering • guild system begins • agricultural base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • much trade • use of money instead of bartering • foreign goods come to Western Europe • guild system well in place • much agriculture
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latin was the language • hardly any education except through the church • leaders were illiterate • history was told in song and poem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church plays large role in educating the people • Roman law is written in the language of the people, not just Latin, the language of the Church
Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tribal leaders • small battles • invasions • thieves and robbers roamed the land and sea looking for trouble 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crusades unite the people behind their leaders, the Pope and the kings

Women in the Middle Ages

When we study history, we usually learn about the people who were rich and famous. This is especially true of the Middle Ages. Sadly, women have been the most ignored group in history. This is not to say that women did not play important roles at different times. Some notable women throughout world history are listed in the chart below.

Notable Women of History	
Cleopatra (Egypt) 1st Century	
Joan of Arc (France) 15th Century	
Isabella (Spain) 15th Century	
Elizabeth I (England) 16th Century	
Maria Theresa (Austria) 18th Century	
Marie Antoinette (born in Austria, ruled in France) 18th Century	
Catherine the Great (Russia) 18th Century	
Harriet Tubman (United States) 19th Century	
Florence Nightingale (England) 20th Century	
Indira Gandhi (India) 20th Century	
Golda Meir (born in Ukraine, served in Israel) 20th Century	
Mother Teresa (born in Albania, served in India) 20th Century	

During the early part of the Middle Ages, records show that there were more men than women. As a result, women were in demand as wives. The value of women and their status in society increased. Men actually paid high prices to the fathers of girls in order to marry them.

Why weren't there enough women? The answer is probably that women's work in the fields was so difficult that they died at young ages. Also, women were defenseless against attacks during the invasions into Western Europe.

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, women began to live longer because society, as a whole, was more stable as the invasions stopped. Therefore, women were in less danger from attack. In addition, as the feudal system grew in importance, women of noble birth were given a new status.

In the late Middle Ages, knights adopted a code of *chivalry*. The code of chivalry called for women of a certain social class to be protected and cherished. Wandering poets called *troubadours* adopted this view. The poems and love songs praised the perfection, beauty, and wit of women throughout the ages. Later, these ideas of chivalry would shape our modern idea of romantic love and become the basis for the development of good manners in Western society.



A third reason why women lived longer was that better farming methods were beginning to be used. Instead of fighting, men now did more of the work on the farms. So, even though women worked hard, they now had help.

Finally, with the growth of the towns and cities, women were not given a chance to work. Men worked in the towns and cities; women stayed at home and did domestic chores. In other words, life in the towns and cities was easier for women than life on the farms.



Toward the end of the Middle Ages, the population of women increased. Then, there were more women than men. This caused problems. Fathers had to pay a price, or a *dowry*, of goods, property, and money in order to find husbands for their daughters. Girls became a burden to the family. They were unable to earn their keep.

Throughout the Middle Ages and even today in some parts of the world, families sign marriage agreements when their children are very young. During the Middle Ages, young women were married when they were around 12 years of age. Women who did not marry often entered convents and became nuns.

Review

Western Europe suffered from continued invasion by barbarian tribes after the fall of Rome in A.D. 476. For the next 500 years or so, these invasions kept Western Europe in a state of disorder. People were scared to travel and trade declined. The only organization trying to keep order in Western Europe was the Roman Catholic Church. The church was eventually able to get some barbarian tribes to convert to Christianity and settle down.

The most powerful barbarian tribes came from what is now Germany. By the end of the fifth century, two Germanic tribes, the Angles and Saxons, controlled present-day England. Another tribe, the Franks, ruled in what is now France. Clovis, an early ruler of the Franks, became a Christian.

Charles Martel, a leader of the Franks, defeated Islamic invaders in A.D. 732 in the Battle of Tours. This victory helped to ensure the power of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe. Charles Martel's son, Pepin the Short, became the first king of the Franks. Pepin gave the pope captured lands in Italy and offered his protection. This protection by the Franks helped the Church to grow stronger.

Pepin's son, Charlemagne, extended the rule of the Franks over more territory in Italy and present-day Germany. Charlemagne, like his father, was a Christian. In A.D. 800 the pope crowned Charlemagne as the emperor of Rome. Charlemagne eventually gained control over much of central Europe. Unlike most barbarian rulers of his age, Charlemagne was educated and promoted learning.

After Charlemagne's death in A.D. 814, his empire began to fall apart. The age of feudalism was now beginning, as wealthy landowners and generals gained power. In the Treaty of Verdun of A.D. 843, Charlemagne's former empire was divided into three parts: the East, Central, and West Frankish kingdoms.

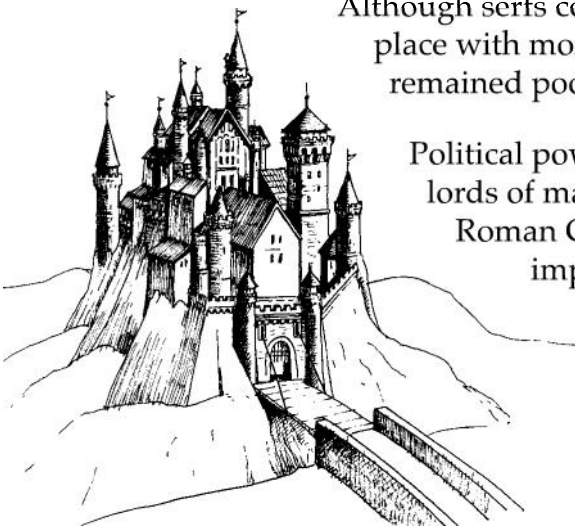
The 500 years after the fall of Rome make up the early Middle Ages. Because Western European civilization at that time was in a state of decline, these years are also sometimes called the Dark Ages. The cause of this decline was the continuation of invasions by the barbarians. Not only were the Germanic tribes, such as the Saxons, causing trouble, but also other invaders, such as the Vikings from the north and the Muslims from the south.

Apart from the time of Charlemagne's empire, Western Europe was unable to unite. This inability to unite made it difficult for Europeans to defend themselves from the invaders. Powerful landlords had castles built for protection. Peasants, called serfs, farmed the lord's land. In addition, the lord hired professional soldiers, called vassals, to help defend the castle. Both the serfs and the vassals got something out of this relationship with the lord. In return for farming, the serfs were given protection inside the castle. In return for fighting for the lord, the vassal got a place to live, food to eat, and a fief or estate.

A lord's castle, plus his farmland, made up his manor. The manor provided food, housing, and protection for the people who lived on it. The system of relationships between lord, vassals, and serfs is known as the feudal system. It was a rigid social system. A serf, for instance, could never rise above the status of serf.

For most people during the Dark Ages, education was not very important. However, the Roman Catholic Church kept learning alive. Monks studied together and copied records and reports. The Roman Catholic Church also participated in the feudal system. It owned manors just as the lords did. What the Church taught the people also went along with the feudal system. The Church taught people to be obedient and accept their roles in life.

The late Middle Ages began when the invasions into Western Europe ended. As the feudal system continued, the most powerful feudal lords became kings. With the threat of invasions gone, trade and population grew. Merchants gained wealth and cities grew larger. Although serfs could now move from place to place with more freedom, most poor people remained poor.



Political power began to shift from individual lords of manors to kings and the pope. The Roman Catholic Church also began to improve the education of the people. Universities were now begun. The Church also decided it was time to take back the Holy Land from the Muslims. For 200 years, beginning in 1095,

Europeans went on Crusades to try to regain the Holy Land in the Middle East. Although almost all of the Crusades failed, Europe received benefits from them. For instance, trade with the East improved, and new ideas, which helped to stimulate learning, were brought back by the Crusaders.

Women had an especially difficult time during the early Middle Ages. Many died because of the difficulty of their work in the fields. Later, knights adopted a code of chivalry which called for women of high class to be protected and cherished.



ready for battle