ALL THOSE
TERRIFYING HISTORIES SERIES

Kenneth Cavalcanti (ed.)

Unsolved Mysteries of the Strange Medieval Period

feat. The Shroud of Turin, The Vinland Map, The Voynich Manuscript, The Crusade of Children, The Dancing Plague, The Green Children, Erik the Red and Leif Erikksen, Owain Glyndŵr, King Edward II and other enigmas

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INTEGRAL

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#1

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INTEGRAL

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Why Were So ”Dark” The Dark Middle Ages

Middle Ages represent a millenium of the European history, conventionally regarded from the 5th to the 15th century After Christ or from the decline of the Western Roman Empire (the deposition of the last emperor, Flavius Romulus Augustus, by Odoacer), to the disapperance of the Eastern Roman Empire, after the fall of Constantinople on May 29, 1453.

The Middle Ages is basically the ”middle” period of the three traditional divisions of Western history: classical antiquity, the medieval period, and the modern period. The medieval period is itself subdivided into the Early, High, and Late Middle Ages.

Population decline, counterurbanisation, collapse of centralized authority, invasions, and mass migrations of tribes, which had begun in Late Antiquity, continued in the Early Middle Ages. The large-scale movements of the Migration Period, including various Germanic peoples, formed new kingdoms in what remained of the Western Roman Empire. In the 7th century, North Africa and the Middle East—once part of the Byzantine Empire—came under the rule of the Umayyad Caliphate, an Islamic empire, after conquest by Muhammad's successors. Although there were substantial changes in society and political structures, the break with classical antiquity was not complete. The still-sizeable Byzantine Empire, Rome's direct continuation, survived in the Eastern Mediterranean and remained a major power. The empire's law code, the *Corpus Juris Civilis* or "Code of Justinian", was rediscovered in Northern Italy in 1070 and became widely admired later in the Middle Ages. In the West, most kingdoms incorporated the few extant Roman institutions. Monasteries were founded as campaigns to Christianise pagan Europe continued. The Franks, under the Carolingian dynasty, briefly established the Carolingian Empire during the later 8th and early 9th centuries. It covered much of Western Europe but later succumbed to the pressures of internal civil wars combined with external invasions: Vikings from the north, Magyars from the east and Saracens from the south.

During the High Middle Ages, which began after 1000, the population of Europe increased greatly as technological and agricultural innovations allowed trade to flourish and the Medieval Warm Period climate change allowed crop yields to increase. Manorialism, the organisation of peasants into villages that owed rent and labour services to the nobles, and feudalism, the political structure whereby knights and lower-status nobles owed military service to their overlords in return for the right to rent from lands and manors, were two of the ways society was organised in the High Middle Ages. The Crusades, first preached in 1095, were military attempts by Western European Christians to regain control of the Holy Land from Muslims. Kings became the heads of centralised nation-states, reducing crime and violence but making the ideal of a unified Christendom more distant. Intellectual life was marked by scholasticism, a philosophy that emphasised joining faith to reason, and by the founding of universities. The theology of Thomas Aquinas, the paintings of Giotto, the poetry of Dante and Chaucer, the travels of Marco Polo, and the Gothic architecture of cathedrals

such as Chartres are among the outstanding achievements toward the end of this period and into the Late Middle Ages.

The Late Middle Ages was marked by difficulties and calamities including famine, plague, and war, which significantly diminished the population of Europe; between 1347 and 1350, the Black Death killed about a third of Europeans. Controversy, heresy, and the Western Schism within the Catholic Church paralleled the interstate conflict, civil strife, and peasant revolts that occurred in the kingdoms. Cultural and technological developments transformed European society, concluding the Late Middle Ages and beginning the early modern period.

The "Middle Ages" term first appears in Latin in 1469 as *media tempestas* or "middle season". In early usage, there were many variants, including *medium aevum*, or "middle age", first recorded in 1604, and *media saecula*, or "middle centuries", first recorded in 1625. The adjective "medieval" (or sometimes "mediaeval" or "mediæval"), meaning pertaining to the Middle Ages, derives from *medium aevum*.

Medieval writers divided history into periods such as the "Six Ages" or the "Four Empires", and considered their time to be the last before the end of the world. When referring to their own times, they spoke of them as being "modern". In the 1330s, the humanist and poet Petrarch referred to pre-Christian times as *antiqua* (or "ancient") and to the Christian period as *nova* (or "new"). Leonardo Bruni was the first historian to use tripartite periodisation in his *History of the Florentine People* (1442), with a middle period "between the fall of the Roman Empire and the revival of city life sometime in late eleventh and twelfth centuries". Tripartite periodisation became standard after the 17th-century German historian Christoph Cellarius divided history into three periods: ancient, medieval and modern.

The most commonly given starting point for the Middle Ages is around 500, with the date of 476 first used by Bruni. Later starting dates are sometimes used in the outer parts of Europe. For Europe as a whole, 1500 is often considered to be the end of the Middle Ages, but there is no universally agreed upon end date. Depending on the context, events such as the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, Christopher Columbus's first voyage to the Americas in 1492, or the Protestant Reformation in 1517 are sometimes used. English historians often use the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 to mark the end of the period. For Spain, dates commonly used are the death of King Ferdinand II in 1516, the death of Queen Isabella I of Castile in 1504, or the conquest of Granada in 1492.

Historians from Romance-speaking countries tend to divide the Middle Ages into two parts: an earlier "High" and later "Low" period. English-speaking historians, following their German counterparts, generally subdivide the Middle Ages into three intervals: "Early", "High", and "Late". But, in the 19th century, the entire Middle Ages were often referred to as the "Dark Ages", but with the adoption of these subdivisions, use of this term was restricted to the Early Middle Ages, at least among historians.

The political structure of Western Europe changed with the end of the united Roman Empire. Although the movements of peoples during this period are usually described as "invasions", they were not just military expeditions but migrations of entire peoples into the empire. Such movements were aided by the refusal of the Western Roman elites to support the army or pay the taxes that would have allowed the military to suppress the migration. The emperors of the 5th century were often controlled by military strongmen such as Stilicho (d. 408), Aetius (d. 454), Aspar (d. 471), Ricimer (d. 472), or Gundobad (d. 516), who were partly or fully of non-Roman background. When the line of Western emperors ceased, many of the kings who replaced them were from the same background. Intermarriage between the new kings and the Roman elites was common. This led to a fusion of Roman culture with the customs of the invading tribes, including the popular assemblies that allowed free male tribal members more say in political matters than was common in the Roman state. Material artefacts left by the Romans and the invaders are often similar, and tribal items were often modelled on Roman objects. Much of the scholarly and written culture of the new

kingdoms was also based on Roman intellectual traditions. An important difference was the gradual loss of tax revenue by the new polities. Many of the new political entities no longer supported their armies through taxes, instead relying on granting them land or rents. This meant there was less need for large tax revenues and so the taxation systems decayed. Warfare was common between and within the kingdoms. Slavery declined as the supply weakened, and society became more rural.

Between the 5th and 8th centuries, new peoples and individuals filled the political void left by Roman centralised government. The Ostrogoths, a Gothic tribe, settled in Roman Italy in the late fifth century under Theoderic the Great (d. 526) and set up a kingdom marked by its co-operation between the Italians and the Ostrogoths, at least until the last years of Theodoric's reign. The Burgundians settled in Gaul, and after an earlier realm was destroyed by the Huns in 436 formed a new kingdom in the 440s. Between today's Geneva and Lyon, it grew to become the realm of Burgundy in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. Elsewhere in Gaul, the Franks and Celtic Britons set up small polities. Francia was centred in northern Gaul, and the first king of whom much is known is Childeric I (d. 481). His grave was discovered in 1653 and is remarkable for its grave goods, which included weapons and a large quantity of gold.

Under Childeric's son Clovis I (r. 509–511), the founder of the Merovingian dynasty, the Frankish kingdom expanded and converted to Christianity. The Britons, related to the natives of Britannia – modern-day Great Britain – settled in what is now Brittany. Other monarchies were established by the Visigothic Kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula, the Suebi in northwestern Iberia, and the Vandal Kingdom in North Africa. In the sixth century, the Lombards settled in Northern Italy, replacing the Ostrogothic kingdom with a grouping of duchies that occasionally selected a king to rule over them all. By the late sixth century, this arrangement had been replaced by a permanent monarchy, the Kingdom of the Lombards.

The invasions brought new ethnic groups to Europe, although some regions received a larger influx of new peoples than others. In Gaul for instance, the invaders settled much more extensively in the north-east than in the south-west. Slavs settled in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkan Peninsula. The settlement of peoples was accompanied by changes in languages. Latin, the literary language of the Western Roman Empire, was gradually replaced by vernacular languages which evolved from Latin, but were distinct from it, collectively known as Romance languages. These changes from Latin to the new languages took many centuries. Greek remained the language of the Byzantine Empire, but the migrations of the Slavs added Slavic languages to Eastern Europe, where only Romanian incredibly survived as a Romanic language, a derivation of Latina Vulgata.

As Western Europe witnessed the formation of new kingdoms, the Eastern Roman Empire remained intact and experienced an economic revival that lasted into the early 7th century. There were fewer invasions of the eastern section of the empire; most occurred in the Balkans. Peace with the Sasanian Empire, the traditional enemy of Rome, lasted throughout most of the 5th century. The Eastern Empire was marked by closer relations between the political state and Christian Church, with doctrinal matters assuming an importance in Eastern politics that they did not have in Western Europe. Legal developments included the codification of Roman law; the first effort—the *Codex Theodosianus*—was completed in 438. Under Emperor Justinian (r. 527–565), another compilation took place—the *Corpus Juris Civilis*. Justinian also oversaw the construction of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and the reconquest of North Africa from the Vandals and Italy from the Ostrogoths, under Belisarius (d. 565). The conquest of Italy was not complete, as a deadly outbreak of plague in 542 led to the rest of Justinian's reign concentrating on defensive measures rather than further conquests.

At the Emperor's death, the Byzantines had control of most of Italy, North Africa and a small foothold in southern Spain. Justinian's reconquests have been criticised by historians for overextending his realm and setting the stage for the early Muslim conquests, but many of the difficulties faced by

Justinian's successors were due not just to over-taxation to pay for his wars but to the essentially civilian nature of the empire, which made raising troops difficult.

In the Eastern Empire the slow infiltration of the Balkans by the Slavs added a further difficulty for Justinian's successors. It began gradually, but by the late 540s Slavic tribes were in Thrace and Illyrium, and had defeated an imperial army near Adrianople in 551. In the 560s the Avars began to expand from their base on the north bank of the Danube; by the end of the 6th-century, they were the dominant power in Central Europe and routinely able to force the Eastern emperors to pay tribute. They remained a strong power until 796.

An additional problem to face the empire came as a result of the involvement of Emperor Maurice (r. 582–602) in Persian politics when he intervened in a succession dispute. This led to a period of peace, but when Maurice was overthrown, the Persians invaded and during the reign of Emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641) controlled large chunks of the empire, including Egypt, Syria and Anatolia until Heraclius' successful counterattack. In 628 the empire secured a peace treaty and recovered all of its lost territories.

In Western Europe, some of the older Roman elite families died out while others became more involved with ecclesiastical than secular affairs. Values attached to Latin scholarship and education mostly disappeared, and while literacy remained important, it became a practical skill rather than a sign of elite status. In the 4th century, Jerome (d. 420) dreamed that God rebuked him for spending more time reading Cicero than the Bible. By the 6th century, Gregory of Tours (d. 594) had a similar dream, but instead of being chastised for reading Cicero, he was chastised for learning shorthand. By the late 6th century, the principal means of religious instruction in the Church had become music and art rather than the book. Most intellectual efforts went towards imitating classical scholarship, but some original works were created, along with now-lost oral compositions. The writings of Sidonius Apollinaris (d. 489), Cassiodorus (d. c. 585), and Boethius (d. c. 525) were typical of the age.

Changes also took place among laymen, as aristocratic culture focused on great feasts held in halls rather than on literary pursuits. Clothing for the elites was richly embellished with jewels and gold. Lords and kings supported entourages of fighters who formed the backbone of the military forces. Family ties within the elites were important, as were the virtues of loyalty, courage, and honour. These ties led to the prevalence of the feud in aristocratic society, examples of which included those related by Gregory of Tours that took place in Merovingian Gaul. Most feuds seem to have ended quickly with the payment of some sort of compensation. Women took part in aristocratic society mainly in their roles as wives and mothers of men, with the role of mother of a ruler being especially prominent in Merovingian Gaul. In Anglo-Saxon society the lack of many child rulers meant a lesser role for women as queen mothers, but this was compensated for by the increased role played by abbesses of monasteries. Only in Italy does it appear that women were always considered under the protection and control of a male relative.

Peasant society is much less documented than the nobility. Most of the surviving information available to historians comes from archaeology; few detailed written records documenting peasant life remain from before the 9th century. Most of the descriptions of the lower classes come from either law codes or writers from the upper classes. Landholding patterns in the West were not uniform; some areas had greatly fragmented landholding patterns, but in other areas large contiguous blocks of land were the norm. These differences allowed for a wide variety of peasant societies, some dominated by aristocratic landholders and others having a great deal of autonomy. Land settlement also varied greatly. Some peasants lived in large settlements that numbered as many as 700 inhabitants. Others lived in small groups of a few families and still others lived on isolated farms spread over the countryside. There were also areas where the pattern was a mix of two or more of those systems. Unlike in the late Roman period, there was no sharp break between the legal status of the free peasant and the aristocrat, and it was possible for a free

peasant's family to rise into the aristocracy over several generations through military service to a powerful lord.

Roman city life and culture changed greatly in the early Middle Ages. Although Italian cities remained inhabited, they contracted significantly in size. Rome, for instance, shrank from a population of hundreds of thousands to around 30,000 by the end of the 6th century. Roman temples were converted into Christian churches and city walls remained in use. In Northern Europe, cities also shrank, while civic monuments and other public buildings were raided for building materials. The establishment of new kingdoms often meant some growth for the towns chosen as capitals. Although there had been Jewish communities in many Roman cities, the Jews suffered periods of persecution after the conversion of the empire to Christianity. Officially they were tolerated, if subject to conversion efforts, and at times were even encouraged to settle in new areas.

Religious beliefs in the Eastern Empire and Iran were in flux during the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Judaism was an active proselytising faith, and at least one Arab political leader converted to it. Christianity had active missions competing with the Persians' Zoroastrianism in seeking converts, especially among residents of the Arabian Peninsula. All these strands came together with the emergence of Islam in Arabia during the lifetime of Muhammad (d. 632). After his death, Islamic forces conquered much of the Eastern Empire and Persia, starting with Syria in 634–635 and reaching Egypt in 640–641, Persia between 637 and 642, North Africa in the later seventh century, and the Iberian Peninsula in 711. By 714, Islamic forces controlled much of the peninsula in a region they called Al-Andalus.

The Islamic conquests reached their peak in the mid-eighth century. The defeat of Muslim forces at the Battle of Tours in 732 led to the reconquest of southern France by the Franks, but the main reason for the halt of Islamic growth in Europe was the overthrow of the Umayyad Caliphate and its replacement by the Abbasid Caliphate. The Abbasids moved their capital to Baghdad and were more concerned with the Middle East than Europe, losing control of sections of the Muslim lands. Umayyad descendants took over the Iberian Peninsula, the Aghlabids controlled North Africa, and the Tulunids became rulers of Egypt. By the middle of the 8th century, new trading patterns were emerging in the Mediterranean; trade between the Franks and the Arabs replaced the old Roman economy. Franks traded timber, furs, swords and slaves in return for silks and other fabrics, spices, and precious metals from the Arabs.

Christianity was a major unifying factor between Eastern and Western Europe before the Arab conquests, but the conquest of North Africa sundered maritime connections between those areas. Increasingly the Byzantine Church differed in language, practices, and liturgy from the Western Church. The Eastern Church used Greek instead of the Western Latin. Theological and political differences emerged, and by the early and middle 8th century issues such as iconoclasm, clerical marriage, and state control of the Church had widened to the extent that the cultural and religious differences were greater than the similarities. The formal break, known as the East–West Schism, came in 1054, when the Papacy and the Patriarchy of Constantinople clashed over papal supremacy and excommunicated each other, which led to the division of Christianity into two Churches—the Western branch became the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern branch the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The ecclesiastical structure of the Roman Empire survived the movements and invasions in the west mostly intact, but the papacy was little regarded, and few of the Western bishops looked to the bishop of Rome for religious or political leadership. Many of the popes prior to 750 were more concerned with Byzantine affairs and Eastern theological controversies. The register, or archived copies of the letters, of Pope Gregory the Great (pope 590–604) survived, and of those more than 850 letters, the vast majority were concerned with affairs in Italy or Constantinople. The only part of Western Europe where the papacy had influence was Britain, where Gregory had sent the Gregorian mission in 597 to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. Irish missionaries were most active in

Western Europe between the 5th and the 7th centuries, going first to England and Scotland and then on to the continent. Under such monks as Columba (d. 597) and Columbanus (d. 615), they founded monasteries, taught in Latin and Greek, and authored secular and religious works.

The Early Middle Ages witnessed the rise of monasticism in the West. The shape of European monasticism was determined by traditions and ideas that originated with the Desert Fathers of Egypt and Syria. Most European monasteries were of the type that focuses on community experience of the spiritual life, called cenobitism, which was pioneered by Pachomius (d. 348) in the 4th century. Monastic ideals spread from Egypt to Western Europe in the 5th and 6th centuries through hagiographical literature such as the *Life of Anthony*. Benedict of Nursia (d. 547) wrote the Benedictine Rule for Western monasticism during the 6th century, detailing the administrative and spiritual responsibilities of a community of monks led by an abbot. Monks and monasteries had a deep effect on the religious and political life of the Early Middle Ages, in various cases acting as land trusts for powerful families, centres of propaganda and royal support in newly conquered regions, and bases for missions and proselytisation. They were the main and sometimes only outposts of education and literacy in a region. Many of the surviving manuscripts of the Latin classics were copied in monasteries in the Early Middle Ages. Monks were also the authors of new works, including history, theology, and other subjects, written by authors such as Bede (d. 735), a native of northern England who wrote in the late 7th and early 8th centuries.

Efforts by local kings to fight the invaders led to the formation of new political entities. In Anglo-Saxon England, King Alfred the Great (r. 871–899) came to an agreement with the Viking invaders in the late 9th century, resulting in Danish settlements in Northumbria, Mercia, and parts of East Anglia. By the middle of the 10th century, Alfred's successors had conquered Northumbria, and restored English control over most of the southern part of Great Britain. In northern Britain, Kenneth MacAlpin (d. c. 860) united the Picts and the Scots into the Kingdom of Alba. In the early 10th century, the Ottonian dynasty had established itself in Germany, and was engaged in driving back the Magyars. Its efforts culminated in the coronation in 962 of Otto I (r. 936–973) as Holy Roman Emperor. In 972, he secured recognition of his title by the Byzantine Empire, which he sealed with the marriage of his son Otto II (r. 967–983) to Theophanu (d. 991), daughter of an earlier Byzantine Emperor Romanos II (r. 959–963). By the late 10th century Italy had been drawn into the Ottonian sphere after a period of instability; Otto III (r. 996–1002) spent much of his later reign in the kingdom. The western Frankish kingdom was more fragmented, and although kings remained nominally in charge, much of the political power devolved to the local lords.

Missionary efforts to Scandinavia during the 9th and 10th centuries helped strengthen the growth of kingdoms such as Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, which gained power and territory. Some kings converted to Christianity, although not all by 1000. Scandinavians also expanded and colonised throughout Europe. Besides the settlements in Ireland, England, and Normandy, further settlement took place in what became Russia and in Iceland. Swedish traders and raiders ranged down the rivers of the Russian steppe, and even attempted to seize Constantinople in 860 and 907. Christian Spain, initially driven into a small section of the peninsula in the north, expanded slowly south during the 9th and 10th centuries, establishing the kingdoms of Asturias and León.

In Eastern Europe, Byzantium revived its fortunes under Emperor Basil I (r. 867–886) and his successors Leo VI (r. 886–912) and Constantine VII (r. 913–959), members of the Macedonian dynasty. Commerce revived and the emperors oversaw the extension of a uniform administration to all the provinces. The military was reorganised, which allowed the emperors John I (r. 969–976) and Basil II (r. 976–1025) to expand the frontiers of the empire on all fronts. The imperial court was the centre of a revival of classical learning, a process known as the Macedonian Renaissance. Writers such as John Geometres (fl. early 10th century) composed new hymns, poems, and other works. Missionary efforts by both Eastern and Western clergy resulted in the conversion of the Moravians, Bulgars, Bohemians, Poles, Magyars, and Slavic inhabitants of the Kievan Rus'. These conversions contributed to the founding of political states in the lands of those peoples—the states

of Moravia, Bulgaria, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, and the Kievan Rus'. Bulgaria, which was founded around 680, at its height reached from Budapest to the Black Sea and from the Dnieper River in modern Ukraine to the Adriatic Sea. By 1018, the last Bulgarian nobles had surrendered to the Byzantine Empire.

The High Middle Ages was a period of tremendous expansion of population. The estimated population of Europe grew from 35 to 80 million between 1000 and 1347, although the exact causes remain unclear: improved agricultural techniques, the decline of slaveholding, a more clement climate and the lack of invasion have all been suggested. As much as 90 per cent of the European population remained rural peasants. Many were no longer settled in isolated farms but had gathered into small communities, usually known as manors or villages. These peasants were often subject to noble overlords and owed them rents and other services, in a system known as manorialism. There remained a few free peasants throughout this period and beyond, with more of them in the regions of Southern Europe than in the north. The practice of assarting, or bringing new lands into production by offering incentives to the peasants who settled them, also contributed to the expansion of population.

The open-field system of agriculture was commonly practiced in most of Europe, especially in "northwestern and central Europe". Such agricultural communities had three basic characteristics: individual peasant holdings in the form of strips of land were scattered among the different fields belonging to the manor; crops were rotated from year to year to preserve soil fertility; and common land was used for grazing livestock and other purposes. Some regions used a three-field system of crop rotation, others retained the older two-field system.

Other sections of society included the nobility, clergy, and townsmen. Nobles, both the titled nobility and simple knights, exploited the manors and the peasants, although they did not own lands outright but were granted rights to the income from a manor or other lands by an overlord through the system of feudalism. During the 11th and 12th centuries, these lands, or fiefs, came to be considered hereditary, and in most areas they were no longer divisible between all the heirs as had been the case in the early medieval period. Instead, most fiefs and lands went to the eldest son. The dominance of the nobility was built upon its control of the land, its military service as heavy cavalry, control of castles, and various immunities from taxes or other impositions. Castles, initially in wood but later in stone, began to be constructed in the 9th and 10th centuries in response to the disorder of the time, and provided protection from invaders as well as allowing lords defence from rivals. Control of castles allowed the nobles to defy kings or other overlords. Nobles were stratified; kings and the highest-ranking nobility controlled large numbers of commoners and large tracts of land, as well as other nobles. Beneath them, lesser nobles had authority over smaller areas of land and fewer people. Knights were the lowest level of nobility; they controlled but did not own land, and had to serve other nobles.

The clergy was divided into two types: the secular clergy, who lived out in the world, and the regular clergy, who lived under a religious rule and were usually monks. Throughout the period monks remained a very small proportion of the population, usually less than one percent. Most of the regular clergy were drawn from the nobility, the same social class that served as the recruiting ground for the upper levels of the secular clergy. The local parish priests were often drawn from the peasant class. Townsmen were in a somewhat unusual position, as they did not fit into the traditional three-fold division of society into nobles, clergy, and peasants. During the 12th and 13th centuries, the ranks of the townsmen expanded greatly as existing towns grew and new population centres were founded. But throughout the Middle Ages the population of the towns probably never exceeded 10 per cent of the total population

Jews also spread across Europe during the period. Communities were established in Germany and England in the 11th and 12th centuries, but Spanish Jews, long settled in Spain under the Muslims, came under Christian rule and increasing pressure to convert to Christianity. Most Jews

were confined to the cities, as they were not allowed to own land or be peasants. Besides the Jews, there were other non-Christians on the edges of Europe—pagan Slavs in Eastern Europe and Muslims in Southern Europe.

Women in the Middle Ages were officially required to be subordinate to some male, whether their father, husband, or other kinsman. Widows, who were often allowed much control over their own lives, were still restricted legally. Women's work generally consisted of household or other domestically inclined tasks. Peasant women were usually responsible for taking care of the household, child-care, as well as gardening and animal husbandry near the house. They could supplement the household income by spinning or brewing at home. At harvest-time, they were also expected to help with field-work. Townswomen, like peasant women, were responsible for the household, and could also engage in trade. What trades were open to women varied by country and period. Noblewomen were responsible for running a household, and could occasionally be expected to handle estates in the absence of male relatives, but they were usually restricted from participation in military or government affairs. The only role open to women in the Church was that of nuns, as they were unable to become priests.

In central and northern Italy and in Flanders, the rise of towns that were to a degree self-governing stimulated economic growth and created an environment for new types of trade associations. Commercial cities on the shores of the Baltic entered into agreements known as the Hanseatic League, and the Italian Maritime republics such as Venice, Genoa, and Pisa expanded their trade throughout the Mediterranean. Great trading fairs were established and flourished in northern France during the period, allowing Italian and German merchants to trade with each other as well as local merchants. In the late 13th century new land and sea routes to the Far East were pioneered, famously described in *The Travels of Marco Polo* written by one of the traders, Marco Polo (d. 1324). Besides new trading opportunities, agricultural and technological improvements enabled an increase in crop yields, which in turn allowed the trade networks to expand. Rising trade brought new methods of dealing with money, and gold coinage was again minted in Europe, first in Italy and later in France and other countries. New forms of commercial contracts emerged, allowing risk to be shared among merchants. Accounting methods improved, partly through the use of double-entry bookkeeping; letters of credit also appeared, allowing easy transmission of money.

The High Middle Ages was the formative period in the history of the modern Western state. Kings in France, England, and Spain consolidated their power, and set up lasting governing institutions. New kingdoms such as Hungary and Poland, after their conversion to Christianity, became Central European powers. The Magyars settled Hungary around 900 under King Árpád (d. c. 907) after a series of invasions in the 9th century. The Papacy, long attached to an ideology of independence from secular kings, first asserted its claim to temporal authority over the entire Christian world; the Papal Monarchy reached its apogee in the early 13th century under the pontificate of Innocent III (pope 1198–1216). Northern Crusades and the advance of Christian kingdoms and military orders into previously pagan regions in the Baltic and Finnic north-east brought the forced assimilation of numerous native peoples into European culture.

During the early High Middle Ages, Germany was ruled by the Ottonian dynasty, which struggled to control the powerful dukes ruling over territorial duchies tracing back to the Migration period. In 1024, they were replaced by the Salian dynasty, who famously clashed with the papacy under Emperor Henry IV (r. 1084–1105) over Church appointments as part of the Investiture Controversy. His successors continued to struggle against the papacy as well as the German nobility. A period of instability followed the death of Emperor Henry V (r. 1111–25), who died without heirs, until Frederick I Barbarossa (r. 1155–90) took the imperial throne. Although he ruled effectively, the basic problems remained, and his successors continued to struggle into the 13th century. Barbarossa's grandson Frederick II (r. 1220–1250), who was also heir to the throne of Sicily through his mother, clashed repeatedly with the Papacy. His court was famous for its scholars and he was often accused of heresy. He and his successors faced many difficulties, including the invasion of