AP® European History Skills Handbook

An Introduction

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People often say that studying history can be tedious. Far too many students take history courses that include memorizing disconnected lists of facts, dates, and long-dead people. If this has been your experience, history itself is not to blame. Nor is it your fault for "not liking history." Teachers have a responsibility to help students learn to see deep, complex, and interesting connections between the past and the present. At the heart of true historical study are the "habits of mind" that bring history to life. This introduction aims to provide you with the tools necessary to develop the habits of mind needed to be successful on your AP® European History exam, as well as to improve your critical reading, writing, and thinking skills –all of which will be useful in your future endeavors, whether college or career.

For many years, students and teachers in AP® history courses groused about the fact that each of the various exams (U.S. History, European History, and World History) had a different format and measured different skills. Within the past decade, the College Board® has worked to streamline the exams, and at this point, all AP® history exams generally follow the same format and measure the same skills. This handbook will use examples and illustrations from European History and, where applicable, from sections found in this textbook, *Western Civilizations* by Professor Joshua Cole of University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Professor Carol Symes

of University Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. However, you can and should use these methods in all your AP® history courses –and in other subjects, too.

The AP® European History curriculum introduces you to the thinking skills and reasoning processes used by historians when talking and writing about the past. These skills and processes were designed by committees of college faculty and expert AP® teachers to ensure that the AP® course reflects and measures college-level expectations for historical study. Data collected from a range of colleges and universities ensure that the AP® courses and exams represent current scholarship and developments in the discipline of history.

Western Civilizations provides you with the opportunities to learn the six historical thinking skills identified by the experts:

1. Development and processes
2. Sourcing and situation
3. Source claims and evidence
4. Contextualization
5. Making connections
6. Argumentation

Skills 1–5 will be evaluated on both the multiple-choice questions and free-response questions (document-based and long essay questions). However, the last skill, argumentation, will be assessed only through the free-response questions.

You will also learn the three historical reasoning processes by using this textbook for your AP® course:

1. Comparison
2. Causation
3. Continuity and change

As with any activity, whether playing an instrument or perfecting a free throw or learning a new language, habits of mind must be practiced. However, once you master them, they will help you become a better critical reader, thinker, and writer–and, by extension, a more effective student, worker, and citizen.

This introductory handbook also addresses critical reading strategies that will help your study of history. You already know how to read, but can you do so *critically*? Do you know how to take notes *efficiently* as part of your critical reading

process? The first section of this handbook addresses some techniques that will help improve your reading and note-taking skills.

Critical Reading Strategies for AP® History

When you pick up a novel to read by the pool or before bed, you're likely reading passively and for pleasure. You aren't necessarily concentrating for deeper meaning or understanding; your mind may even wander as you read. There might be sections that you find boring or skip altogether. When reading a textbook, historical monograph, or primary document, you cannot read passively. You must read *actively* for understanding and meaning. The following strategies are skills to help you read more quickly and effectively for comprehension.

Unlike other forms of reading, critical reading requires that you complete multiple passes through the text so that you can get the most out of the material. Don't worry. These are not the word-for-word readings that you might expect. Instead, you do a preliminary scan to familiarize yourself with the overall structure of the book, a skim of the chapter to get the big picture, a "deep dive" reading for understanding and learning, and finally, a reflective review to condense your knowledge by summarizing. Fully engaged active reading will involve note-taking to reinforce learning.

"READING" #1: KNOW YOUR TEXTBOOK (No need to take notes.)

Special Note: You need to do this initial reading only the first time you encounter your textbook.

1. Examine the title page:
   - Who are the authors and what are their qualifications?
   - Who is the publisher and when was the text published? What does that tell you about the book?
2. Examine the preface or introduction:
   - What is the purpose of the preface?
   - Do the authors introduce any unusual features of your book in the preface and prepare you to be on the lookout for them?
3. Examine the table of contents:
   - What does the table of contents tell you about the

history covered?
- How is this textbook organized? What are the main divisions?

4. Examine the index, glossary, and any other material at the back of the book:
   - What sort of topics should be looked up in the index instead of in the table of contents?
   - Is there a glossary in your textbook? Are pronunciation symbols provided to help you pronounce words?
   - Is there an appendix in your book? Why isn't this information included in the body of the book?
5. Examine the study questions, guides, and other learning aids:
   - Are the study aids in the form of questions, exercises, or activities? Where are they located throughout the chapter?
   - If the text poses study questions, do they merely require finding the answers, or must you perform some critical thinking to arrive at answers?
   - Does the text provide suggestions for other readings or materials designed to help you understand the chapter?
6. Examine the chapter headings, section headings, margin guides, and graphics features:
   - How do the chapter headings and the section headings help you structure your thinking?
   - How do the headings and different types of fonts help you when skimming a chapter for specific information?
   - How can you use topic sentences, photo captions, other artwork (maps, charts, diagrams, tables), and summaries to extend and organize your reading?

"READING" #2: SURVEY THE CHAPTER (No need to take notes.)

Before your in-depth reading of each textbook chapter, spending a few minutes surveying the material will prove helpful. This survey is similar to knowing the overall plot of a movie before watching it. During the second reading stage, you are merely getting primed. Skim through the chapter and see how the headings and subheadings are organized. Read

any chapter summaries. Briefly survey the chapter introduction by reading the topic sentences in each paragraph.

As you complete this quick survey, you will want to ask the following questions:

- What is the overall theme for this chapter?
- What historical period is covered?
- What significant changes take place in the period covered by this chapter?
- Can you make any connections or comparisons of items in the text to your prior knowledge or a preceding chapter?

The point of this step is to get the big picture the chapter is trying to impart and to understand the overall view before you take a deep dive into the material. At this point, you haven't written any notes and likely have spent around five minutes in your survey of the material. Nevertheless, you have a good preview of what you will be reading and have saved yourself time because you will complete the next step more efficiently.

"READING" #3: "DEEP DIVE" READING FOR UNDERSTANDING (Take notes.)

As your instructor will tell you, reading the assigned material *before* a class lecture or lesson is crucial to understanding the material presented in class. As you do this, remember that you must read actively and maintain focus. The best way to stay focused is to take notes, but first you must understand what you have read. A brief online search regarding active-reading strategies will result in tips touting techniques with five, six, or even ten steps to improve your active reading. But nearly all of those resources share four main components:

1. Asking questions while you read
2. Identifying or defining any unfamiliar words
3. Taking well-organized notes
4. Writing a summary of the material

The actions do not always need to take place in this order. Over time, they will develop into a habit—a "habit of mind" – that will come naturally. These four actions are the most significant strategies for successful active reading.

Ask Questions

Continually asking questions is at the heart of historical thinking, as well as critical reading. One technique is that, as you're reading a textbook, try changing all the titles, subtitles, and section and paragraph headings into questions. See page 40 of the textbook, for example. The section heading "Life After the Black Death" might become "What Was Life Like After the Black Death?" Or, you could employ the five "W" questions to attack the reading: *Who* is the chapter/section about? *What* does the chapter/section say about this person or group? *Where* did the actions involving this person/group take place? *When* did these actions take place? (Don't forget that this is history; dates matter.) *Why* did the events take place? Why are these events significant? Why should we care?

No one set of questions is right for everyone, so you might try both of these suggested questioning techniques to determine what works best for you. Over time, you may develop your own set of questions based on the type of textbook or subject that you're studying.

Identify Unfamiliar Words

Comprehending what you are reading begins by fully understanding the words found in the text. As you read, are you finding any words you don't understand? If so, it is imperative that you clarify or define those words so that you can more clearly understand the passage or section.

Typically, the first step readers take is to try and understand the word based on the context (how the term is used in a sentence, paragraph, or section). Does the word become clearer as you reread the words preceding it or as you read further into the text? Although context clues are frequently a solid way to decipher meaning, looking words up in a dictionary, glossary, or other source is an important technique used by active readers. Adding new terms to your notes can expand your history vocabulary and enrich your essay writing.

If you encounter a confusing or difficult to understand passage, defining any unfamiliar terms will typically ease the confusion. However, there are times when even if you do know the terms, you may find that you still don't completely understand. The final step to fully identify what you're reading is often to *slowly reread* a sentence, paragraph, or section—even aloud. Varying your reading rate and slowing down for

tough passages is often necessary for understanding. Slow down enough to enable yourself to untangle tough sections and get an accurate idea of the essential concepts in the passage.

Take Notes

As you complete the "deep dive" reading for understanding, you will want to take notes. Reading the text alone is not adequate. Good note-taking is a key component of learning the material and remembering the most important points. Note-taking may seem a simple task, yet students often experience difficulties with it. The first thing you should remember is that highlighting is not the same as note-taking—especially if you find yourself highlighting nearly everything! Actively writing out your ideas will help reinforce learning, but you should take notes only after you comprehend the passage. Ask questions, identify words and concepts, and summarize the material as you read each chapter, then use an outline to guide your note-taking. The easiest outline is one based on the textbook chapter headings, subheadings, and subsections. Using your outline, go back through the text and take note of the items that signify the main ideas and supporting details of that section.

A difficulty that students often face is taking too many notes. If your notes include most of the text in the book, there's a good chance you aren't differentiating between the author's main points and the material used to tie these points together. So, be concise. Create a set of abbreviations for frequent words or use symbols. Possible examples might include a triangle or delta sign (Δ) to indicate change, a down arrow (↓) to indicate a decline, or a dollar sign ($) to indicate money, and so on. The key thing is that you don't need to write everything: the main idea and one or two examples will suffice. As an early part of your note-taking, you might consider marking comments in the margin of the book if you own it. If you don't, write your comments on sticky notes and place them in the margins. Once you have completed this, add those comments and a summary to your notes for that section.

Write a Summary

When you write a summary, you should precisely and briefly account for the most significant parts of a text. If you can write an effective overview, it is a decent sign that you read the text carefully and comprehended its major arguments and supporting points. Your summary should explain the main idea of each chapter and answer each of the questions that you originally posed. For most people, this is the final step of the note-taking process. For your purposes, a summary does not need to be too long; between thirty-five and fifty words should be sufficient.

Practice

See Chapter 1 to practice. Complete "Readings" #2 and #3, take a set of notes, and then write a summary for the chapter.

AP® Historical Reasoning Processes

Once you have learned historical content through a careful reading of your textbook and supporting documents, you will use historical reasoning to investigate, interpret, and evaluate these past events. Three historical reasoning processes identified by the College Board® will help you think like a historian as you develop arguments that you can support in your written work.

REASONING PROCESS 1: COMPARISON

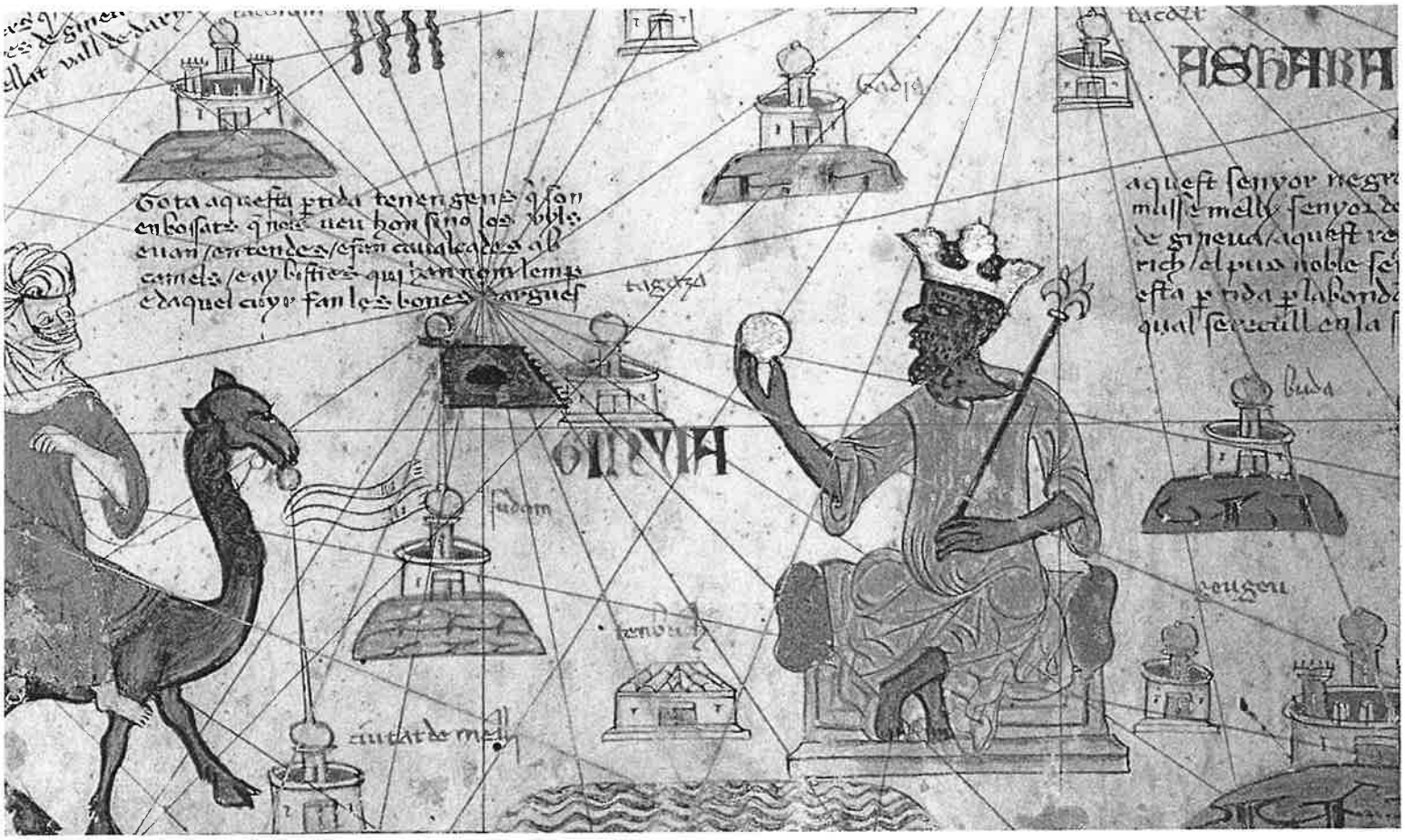
Reasoning Process 1 is comparison. Students will be expected to demonstrate this by completing the following:[1]

- Describe similarities and/or differences between different historical developments or processes.
- Explain relevant similarities and/or differences between specific historical developments and processes.
- Explain the relative historical significance of similarities and/or differences between different historical developments or processes.

One way you can examine historical events/processes and their significance is through comparison. **Comparisons** (sometimes called compare and contrast) help historians understand how one development in the past was similar to or different from another development. Through this reasoning process, historians determine what was unique about particular historical events.

1

The Medieval World, 1250–1350



Before You Read This Chapter

STORY LINES

- The Mongol Empire widened channels of communication, commerce, and cultural exchange between Europe and the Far East. At the same time, Europeans were extending their reach into the Atlantic Ocean.

- Western civilizations' integration with this wider medieval world led to new ways of mapping, measuring, and describing that world.
- Despite these broadening horizons, most Europeans' lives were bounded by their communities and focused on the parish church.
- Meanwhile, the growing strength of the kings of France and England drew them into territorial disputes that led to the Hundred Years' War.
- As global climate change affected the ecosystems of Europe and caused years of famine, the integrated networks of the medieval world facilitated the rapid transmission of the Black Death.

CHRONOLOGY

1206–1279	Rapid expansion of the Mongol Empire under Genghis Khan and his heirs
1240	The territory of Rus' is dominated by the Mongols; Mongol Khanate of the Golden Horde established
1260–1294	Reign of Kublai Khan, Great Khan, and emperor of China
1271–1295	Travels of Marco Polo
1309	"Babylonian Captivity" of the papacy in Avignon begins
1315–1322	The Great Famine in Europe
1320	The Declaration of Arbroath proclaims Scotland's independence from England
1326–1354	The travels of Ibn Battuta
1337	Beginning of the Hundred Years' War
1347–1353	Spread of the Black Death in Europe
1350	Circulation of Mandeville's *Book of Marvels*

CORE OBJECTIVES

- **DESCRIBE** the effects of the Mongol conquests.
- **IDENTIFY** the key characteristics of the medieval world system.
- **UNDERSTAND** the reasons for the papacy's loss of prestige and the rise of strong secular monarchs.
- **DEFINE** the concept of sovereignty and its importance.
- **EXPLAIN** the rapid spread of the Black Death in this historical context.

When Christopher Columbus set out to find a new trade route to the East, he carried with him two influential travel narratives written centuries before his voyage. One was *The Book of Marvels*, composed around 1350 and attributed to John de Mandeville, an English adventurer (writing in French) who claimed to have reached the far horizons of the globe. The other was Marco Polo's *Description of the World*, an account of that Venetian merchant's journey through the vast Eurasian realm of the Mongol Empire to the court of the Great Khan in China. He had dictated it to an author of popular romances around 1298, when both men (Marco Polo and his ghostwriter) were in prison—coincidentally, in Columbus's own city of Genoa. Both books were the product of an extraordinary era of unprecedented

interactions among the peoples of Europe, Asia, and the interconnected Mediterranean world. And both became highly influential, inspiring generations of mercantile adventurers, ambitious pilgrims, and armchair travelers. Eventually, they would fuel the imaginations of those future mariners who launched a further age of discovery (see Chapter 3).

In many ways, these narratives were as fantastical as they were factual, making them problematic sources for historians. But they are representative of an era that seemed wide open to every sort of influence. This was a time when ease of communication and commercial exchange made Western civilizations part of an interlocking network that had the potential to span the globe. Although this network would prove fragile in the face of a large-scale demographic crisis, the Black Death, it created a lasting impression of infinite possibilities. Indeed, it was only *because* of this network's connective channels that the Black Death wreaked such devastation, beginning—as recent research shows—in Asia at least a century before its arrival in Europe around 1347. Looking back, we can see the century leading up to this near-worldwide crisis as the beginning of a new global age.

Europeans' integration with this widening world not only put them into contact with unfamiliar cultures and commodities but it also opened up new ways of looking at the world they already knew. Novel artistic and intellectual responses are discernible in this era, as are a host of new inventions and technologies. At the same time, involvement in this wider world placed new pressures on long-term developments within Europe, notably the growing tensions among large territorial monarchies, and between these secular powers and the authority of the papacy. By the early fourteenth century, the papal court was literally held hostage by the king of France. A few decades later, the king of England openly declared his own claim to the French throne. The ensuing struggles for sovereignty would have a profound impact on the balance of power in Europe, and further complicate Europeans' relationships with one another and with their far-flung neighbors.

THE MONGOL EMPIRE AND THE REORIENTATION OF THE WEST

In our long-term survey of Western civilizations, we have frequently noted the existence of strong links between the Mediterranean world and the Far East. Trade along the network of trails known as the Silk Road can be traced far back into antiquity, and we have seen that such overland networks were extended by Europe's waterways and by the sea. But it was not until the late thirteenth century that Europeans were able to establish direct connections with India, China, and the so-called Spice Islands of the Indonesian archipelago. For Europeans, these connections would prove profoundly important, as much for their impact on the European imagination as for their economic significance. For the peoples of Asia, however, the more frequent appearance of Europeans was less consequential than the events that made these journeys possible: the rise of a new empire that encompassed the entire continent.

The Expansion of the Mongol Empire

Effects of the Mongol Conquests and Their Significance

▶ Transcript

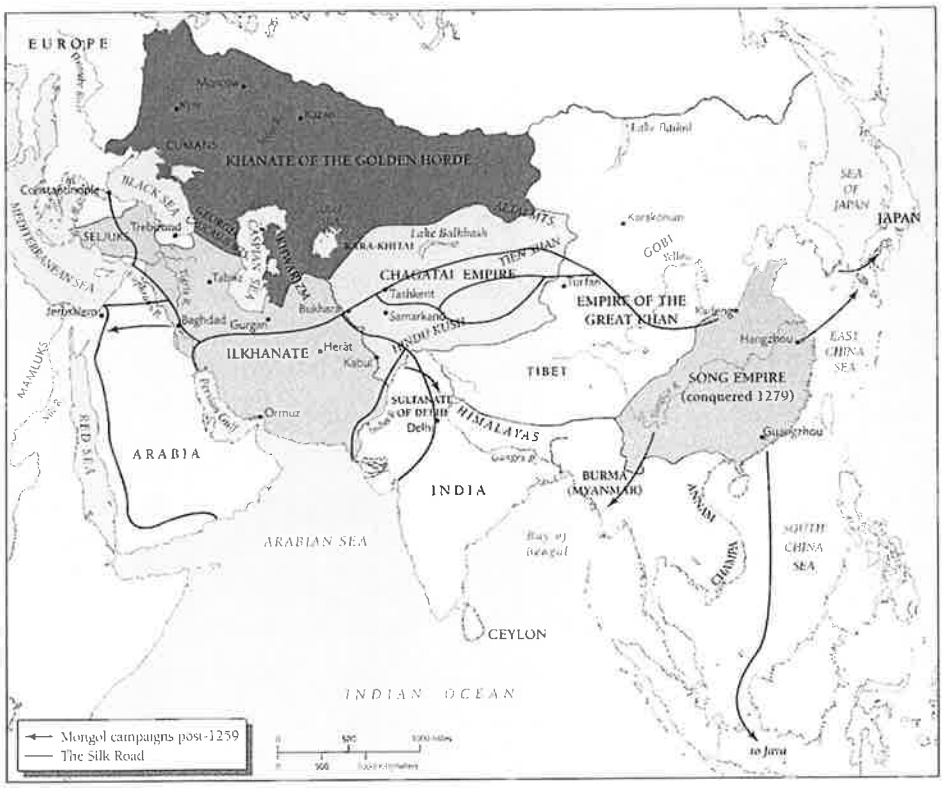
The Mongols were among many nomadic peoples inhabiting the vast steppes of central Asia. Although closely connected with the Turkish populations with whom they frequently intermarried, the Mongols spoke their own distinctive language and had their own homeland, located to the north of the Gobi Desert in what is now known as Mongolia. Essentially, the Mongols were herdsmen whose daily lives and wealth depended on the sheep that provided shelter (sheepskin tents), woolen clothing, milk, and meat; but they were also highly accomplished horsemen and raiders. Indeed, it was to curtail their raiding ventures that the Chinese had fortified their Great Wall many centuries before. Primarily, though, China defended itself from the Mongols by attempting to ensure that the Mongols remained internally divided, with their energies turned against each other.

In the late twelfth century, however, a Mongol chief named Temujin (c. 1162–1227) began to unite the various tribes under his rule. He did so by incorporating the warriors of each defeated tribe into his own army, gradually building up a large and terrifyingly effective military force. In 1206, his supremacy over all these tribes was reflected in his new title: **Genghis Khan** (from the Mongol words meaning "universal ruler"). This new name also revealed his wider ambitions and, in 1209, Genghis Khan began to direct his enormous army against the Mongols' neighbors.

Taking advantage of the fact that China was then divided into three warring states, Genghis Khan launched an attack on the Chin Empire of the north and managed to penetrate deep into its interior by 1211. These initial attacks were probably looting expeditions rather than deliberate attempts at conquest, but their aims were soon sharpened under Genghis Khan's successors. Shortly after his death in 1227, a full-scale invasion of both northern and western China was under way. In 1234, these regions also fell to the Mongols. By 1279, one of Genghis Khan's numerous grandsons, Kublai Khan, would complete the conquest by adding southern China to the empire.

For the first time in centuries, China was reunited, although under Mongol rule. It was also connected to western and central Asia in ways unprecedented in its long history, because Genghis Khan had brought crucial commercial cities and the Silk Road trading posts (Tashkent,

Samarkand, and Bukhara) into his empire. Building on these achievements, one of his sons, Ögedei (*EHRG-uh-day*), laid plans for an even farther-reaching expansion of Mongol influence. Between 1237 and 1240, the Mongols under his command conquered the Rus' capital at Kyiv and then launched a two-pronged assault directed at the rich lands of the European frontier. The smaller of the two Mongol armies swept through Poland toward Germany; the larger army went southwest toward Hungary. In April 1241, the smaller Mongol force met a hastily assembled army of Germans and Poles at the battle of Legnica in southern Poland, where the Mongols were driven back at the cost of many lives on both sides. Two days later, the larger Mongol army annihilated the Hungarian army at the river Sajo. It could have moved even deeper into Europe after this important victory, but it withdrew when Ögedei Khan died in December of that year.



THE STATES OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE. Like Alexander's, Genghis Khan's empire was swiftly assembled and encompassed vast portions of Europe and Asia. ▪ ***How many different Mongol khanates were there after 1260, when Kublai Khan came to power? Were these domains mapped onto older divisions within Western civilizations? ▪ How might the Mongol occupation of the Islamic world have aided the expansion of European trade? ▪ At the same time, why would it have complicated the efforts of crusader armies in the Holy Land?***

Muscovy and the Mongol Khanate

The capital of Rus' at Kyiv had fostered crucial diplomatic and trading relations with both western Europe and Byzantium, as well as with the Islamic caliphate at Baghdad. But that dynamic changed with the arrival of the Mongols, who shifted the locus of power from Kyiv to their own settlement on the lower Volga River. From there, they extended their dominion over a vast terrain, stretching from the Black Sea to central Asia. It became known as the Khanate of the Golden Horde, a name that captures the striking impression made by the Mongol tents, which literally shone with wealth because many were hung with cloth of gold. (The word *horde* derives from the Mongol word meaning "encampment" and the related Turkish word *ordu*, "army.")



THE BATTLE OF LEGNICA, 1241. This image from a fourteenth-century chronicle shows heavily armored knights from Poland and Germany (on the right) confronting the swift-moving mounted archers of the Mongol cavalry (on the left). Mongol warriors often had the advantage over Europeans because their smaller, faster horses carried lighter loads and riders could shoot down their opponents at long range. ▪ ***Which army appears to be gaining the upper hand here?***



A MONGOL ROBE IN CLOTH OF GOLD. The majestic term *Khanate of the Golden Horde* captures both the power and the splendor of the Mongol warriors who conquered Rus' and many other lands. The robe depicted here dates from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century and was made from cloth of gold: silk woven with gold (and sometimes silver) threads, a precious but surprisingly durable material that was also used for banners and even tents. A robe similar to this one was recently sold at auction for nearly a quarter of a million dollars.

Initially, the Mongols ruled Rus' lands directly, installing their own administrative officials and requiring local princes to show their obedience to the Great Khan by traveling in person to the Mongol court in China. But after Kublai Khan's death in 1294, the Mongols began to tolerate the existence of several semi-independent principalities from which they demanded regular tribute. Kyiv did not recover its dominant position, but one of these principalities, the duchy of Moscow, gained new political and economic prominence due to its strategic geographical location. Moscow became the tribute-collecting center for the Mongol Khanate, and so was supplied with resources to defend itself against attack. Its dukes were even encouraged to extend their lordship to neighboring territories in the region in order to increase its security. Eventually, the Muscovite dukes came to control the khanate's tax-collecting mechanisms. As a reflection of these extended powers, Duke Ivan I (r. 1325–1340) gained the title Grand Prince of Rus'. When the Mongol Empire began to disintegrate, the Muscovites were therefore in a strong position to succeed their former overlords.

The Making of the Mongol Ilkhanate

As Ögedei Khan moved into the lands of Rus' and eastern Europe, Mongol armies were also sent to subdue the vast territory that had been encompassed by the former Persian Empire, then those by the empires of Alexander and Rome. Indeed, the strongest state in this region was known as the sultanate of Rûm (the Arabic word for "Rome"). This Sunni Muslim sultanate had been founded by the Seljuk Turks in 1077, just prior to the launching of the First Crusade, and consisted of Anatolian provinces formerly belonging to the eastern Roman Empire. It had successfully withstood waves of European crusading ventures while capitalizing on the further misfortunes of Byzantium, taking over several key ports on the Mediterranean and the Black Sea as well as cultivating a flourishing overland trade.

But in 1243, the Seljuks of Rûm were forced to surrender to the Mongols, who had already succeeded in occupying what is now Iraq, Iran, portions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the Christian kingdoms of Georgia and Armenia. Thereafter, the Mongols easily found their way into regions weakened by centuries of Islamic infighting and Christian crusading movements. The eastern Roman Empire had been fatally weakened by the Fourth Crusade. Constantinople was now controlled by the Venetians, and Byzantine successor states centered on Nicaea (in Anatolia) and Epirus (in northern Greece) were hanging on by their fingertips. The capitulation of Rûm left remaining Byzantine possessions in Anatolia without a buffer zone, and most of these were absorbed by the Mongols.

In 1261, emperor Michael VIII Paleologus (r. 1259–1282) managed to regain control of Constantinople and its immediate hinterland, but the depleted empire he ruled was ringed by hostile neighbors. The crusader principality of Antioch, which had been founded in 1098, finally succumbed to the Mongols in 1268. The Mongols themselves were halted in their drive toward Palestine only by the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt, established in 1250 and ruled by a powerful military caste of non-Arab Muslims. The name of this dynasty reflects the fact that its founders were originally Turkic slaves (in Arabic, *mamlūk* means "an enslaved person").



THE MONGOL RULER OF ISLAMIC PERSIA, HIS CHRISTIAN QUEEN, AND HIS JEWISH HISTORIAN. Hulagu Khan (1217–1265) was a grandson of Genghis and a brother of Kublai. He consolidated Persia and its neighboring regions into the Ilkhanate. This image shows him with his wife, Dokuz Khatun, who was a Turkic princess and a Christian. It comes from the *Compendium of Chronicles* by Rashid al-Din (1247–1318), a Jewish convert to Islam, whose work exemplifies the pluralistic culture encouraged by Mongol rule: written in Persian and often translated into Arabic, it embeds the achievements of the Mongol ruler within the long history of Islam. ▪ ***Why would Rashid al-Din have wanted to place the new Mongol dynasty in this historical context?***

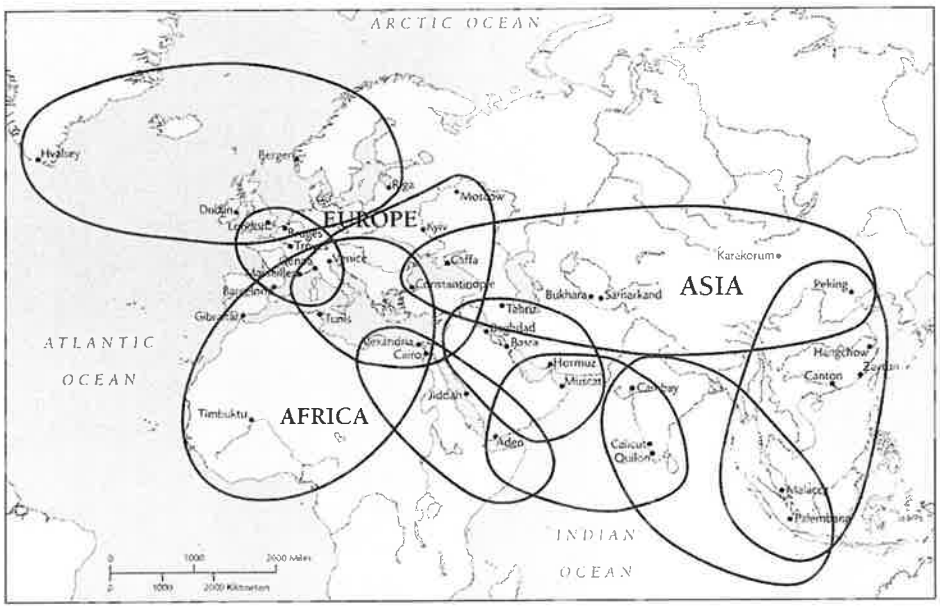
All of these disparate territories came to be called the *Ilkhanate*, the "subordinate khanate," meaning that its Mongol rulers paid deference to the Great Khan. The first Ilkhan was Hulagu, a brother of China's Kublai Khan. His descendants would rule this realm for another eighty years, eventually converting to Islam but remaining hostile toward the Mamluk Muslims, who were their chief rivals.

The Pax Mongolica *and Its Price*

Although the Mongols' expansion of power into Europe had been checked, their combined conquests made them masters of lands that stretched from the Black Sea to the Pacific Ocean: one-fifth of the earth's surface, the largest land empire in history. Yet no single Mongol ruler's power was absolute within this domain. Kublai Khan (1260–1294), who took the additional title *khagan* (or "Great Khan"), never claimed to rule all the Mongol khanates directly. In his own domain of China and Mongolia, his power was highly centralized and built on the intricate (and ancient) imperial bureaucracy of China; but elsewhere, Mongol governance

was directed at securing a steady tribute payment from subjugated peoples, which meant that local rulers could retain much of their power.

This distribution of authority made Mongol rule flexible and adaptable to local conditions, and in this it resembled the Persian Empire and also could be regarded as building on Hellenistic and Roman examples. But if their empire resembled those of antiquity in some respects, the Mongol khans differed from most contemporary European rulers in that they were highly tolerant of all religious beliefs. This was an advantage in governing peoples who observed an array of Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic practices, not to mention Hindus, Jews, and the many itinerant groups and individuals whose languages and beliefs reflected a melding of many cultures.



THE MEDIEVAL WORLD SYSTEM, c. 1300. At the turn of the fourteenth century, Western civilizations were more closely connected to each other and to the rest of the world than ever before: waterways and overland routes stretched from Greenland to the Pacific coast of Southeast Asia and down to West Africa. The interlocking regions and contact zones of this system are represented on this map. ▪ ***How did Europe's relationship with its neighbors change as a result of its integration into this wider world? ▪ How were seemingly marginal territories (such as Rus' or Hungary, Scotland, or Norway) central to one or more interlocking components of this system?***

This acceptance of cultural and religious difference, alongside the Mongols' encouragement of trade and love of rich things, created ideal conditions for some merchants

and artists. Hence, the term ***Pax Mongolica*** ("Mongol Peace") is often used to describe the century from 1250 to 1350, a period in many ways analogous to the one fostered by the Roman Empire at its greatest extent. No such term should be taken at face value, however, because this peace was bought at a great price. The artists whose varied talents created the gorgeous textiles, utensils, and illuminated books prized by the Mongols were not all willing participants in a process that was usually disruptive and often violent. Many were captives subject to ruthless relocation. The Mongols would often transfer entire families and communities of craftsmen from one part of the empire to another, directly and indirectly encouraging a fantastic blend of artistic techniques, materials, and motifs. The result was an intensive period of cultural exchange that might combine Chinese, Persian, Venetian, and Hungarian influences (among many others) in a single work of art. These objects encapsulate the many legacies of the Mongols' empire.

The Mongol Peace was also achieved at the expense of many flourishing Muslim cities that were devastated or crippled during the bloody process of Mongol expansion—cities that had preserved the heritage of even older civilizations. The city of Heràt, situated in one of Afghanistan's few fertile valleys and described by the Persian poet Rumi as the "pearl in the oyster," was entirely destroyed by Genghis Khan in 1221 and did not fully recover for centuries. Baghdad, the splendid capital of the Abbasid caliphate and a haven for artists and intellectuals since the eighth century, was savagely besieged and sacked by the Mongols in 1258. Amid many other atrocities, the capture of the city resulted in the destruction of the House of Wisdom, the library and research center where Muslim scientists, philosophers, and translators preserved classical knowledge and advanced cutting-edge scholarship in such fields as mathematics, engineering, and medicine.

Baghdad's destruction marked the end of medieval Islam's golden age, since the establishment of the Mongol Ilkhanate in Persia eradicated a continuous zone of Islamic influence that had blended cultures stretching from southern Spain and North Africa to India.

Bridging East and West

To facilitate the movement of people and goods within their empire, the Mongols began to control the caravan routes that led from the Mediterranean and the Black Sea through central Asia and into China, policing bandits and making conditions safer for travelers. They also encouraged and streamlined trade by funneling many exchanges through the Persian city of Tabriz, on which both land and sea routes from China converged. These measures accelerated and intensified the possible contacts between the Far East and the West. Prior to Mongol control, such commercial networks had been inaccessible to most European merchants. The Silk Road was not so much a highway as a tangle of trails and trading posts, with few outsiders who understood its workings. Now travelers at both ends of the route found their way smoothed.



VENETIAN AMBASSADORS TO THE GREAT KHAN. Around 1270, the Venetian merchant brothers Niccolò and Matteo Polo returned to Europe after their first prolonged journey through the empire of the Great Khan, bearing with them an official letter to the Roman pope. This image, from a manuscript of Marco Polo's *Description of the World*, shows his father and uncle at the moment of their arrival in the Great Khan's court, to which they have seemingly brought a Christian cross and a Bible. ▪ ***Knowing what you've learned about the Mongols and the medieval world, do you think it is plausible that the Polo brothers would have carried these items with them?***

Competing Viewpoints



Two Travel Accounts

Two of the books that influenced Christopher Columbus and his contemporaries were travel narratives describing the exotic worlds that lay beyond Europe—worlds that may or may not have existed as they are described. The first excerpt here is taken from the account dictated by Marco Polo of Venice in 1298. The young Marco had traveled overland from Constantinople to the court of Kublai Khan in the early 1270s, together with his father and uncle. He became a gifted linguist and remained at the Mongol court until the early 1290s, when he returned to Europe after a journey through Southeast Asia and Indonesia, and across the Indian Ocean. The second excerpt is from the Book of Marvels, *attributed to John de Mandeville. This is an almost entirely fictional account of wonders that also became a source for European ideas about Southeast Asia. This particular passage concerns a legendary Christian figure named Prester ("Priest") John, who is alleged to have traveled to the East and become a great ruler.*

Marco Polo's Description of Java

Now know that when one leaves Champa[1] and went between south and southeast 1,500 miles, then one comes up to a very large island called Java which, according to what good sailors say who know it well, is the largest island in the world, for it is more than three thousand miles around. It has a great king; they are idolators and pay tribute to no man in the world. This island is one of very great wealth: they have pepper, nutmeg, spikenard, galangal, cubeb, cloves, and all the expensive spices you can find in the world. To this island come great numbers of ships and merchants who buy many commodities and make great profit and great gain there. On this island, there is such great treasure that no man in the world could recount or describe it. I tell you the Great Khan could never have it on account of the long and fearsome way in sailing there. Merchants from Zaytun[2] and Mangi[3] have already extracted very great treasure from this island, and continue to do so today.

Source: Marco Polo, *Here the Great Island of Java is Described*, trans. Sharon Kinoshita (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2016), p. 149.

John de Mandeville's Description of Prester John

This emperor Prester John has great lands and has many noble cities and good towns in his realm and many great, large islands. For all the country of India is separated into islands by the great floods that come from Paradise, that divide the land into many parts. And also in the sea he has many islands. . . .

This Prester John has under him many kings and many islands and many varied people of various conditions. And this land is full good and rich, but not so rich as is the land of the Great Khan. For the merchants do not come there so commonly to buy merchandise as they do in the land of the Great Khan, for it is too far to travel to. . . .

[Mandeville then goes on to describe the difficulties of reaching Prester John's lands by sea.]

This emperor Prester John always takes as his wife the daughter of the Great Khan, and the Great Khan in the same way takes to wife the daughter of Prester John. For these two are the greatest lords under the heavens.

In the land of Prester John there are many diverse things, and many precious stones so great and so large that men make them into vessels such as platters, dishes, and cups. And there are many other marvels there that it would be too cumbrous and

too long to put into the writing of books. But of the principal islands and of his estate and of his law I shall tell you some part.

This emperor Prester John is Christian and a great part of his country is Christian also, although they do not hold to all the articles of our faith as we do. . . .

And he has under him 72 provinces, and in every province there is a king. And these kings have kings under them, and all are tributaries to Prester John.

And he has in his lordships many great marvels. For in his country is the sea that men call the Gravelly Sea, that is all gravel and sand without any drop of water. And it ebbs and flows in great waves as other seas do, and it is never still. . . . And a three-day journey from that sea there are great mountains out of which flows a great flood that comes out of Paradise. And it is full of precious stones without any drop of water. . . .

He dwells usually in the city of Susa [in Persia]. And there is his principal palace, which is so rich and so noble that no one will believe the report unless he has seen it. And above the chief tower of the palace there are two round pommels of gold and in each of them are two great, large rubies that shine full brightly upon the night. And the principal gates of his palace are of a precious stone that men call sardonyxes [a type of onyx], and the frames and the bars are made of ivory. And the windows of the halls and chambers are of crystal. And the tables upon which men eat, some are made of emeralds, some of amethyst, and some of gold full of precious stones. And the legs that hold up the tables are made of the same precious stones. . . .

Source: *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: 1967), pp. 195–99 (language modernized from Middle English by R. C. Stacey).

Questions for Analysis

1. What does Marco Polo want his readers to know about Java, and why? What does this suggest about the interests of these intended readers?
2. What does Mandeville want his readers to know about Prester John and his domains? Why are these details so important?
3. Which of these accounts seems more trustworthy, and why? Even if we cannot accept one or both at face value, what insight do they give us into the expectations of Columbus and the other European adventurers who relied on these accounts?

Among the first travelers from the West were Franciscan missionaries whose journeys were bankrolled by European rulers. In 1253, the friar William of Rubruck was sent by King Louis IX of France as his ambassador to the Mongol court, with letters of introduction and instructions to make a full report of his findings. Merchants quickly followed. The most famous are three Venetians: the brothers Niccolò and Matteo Polo, and Niccolò's son, Marco (1254–1324). **Marco Polo**'s account of his travels (which began when he was seventeen) includes a report of his twenty-year sojourn in the service of Kublai Khan, and the story of his journey home through the Spice Islands, India, and Persia (see

Competing Viewpoints above). As we noted on page 3, this book had an enormous effect on the European imagination; Christopher Columbus's copy still survives.

Even more impressive in scope than Marco's travels are those of the Muslim adventurer Ibn Battuta (1304–1368), who left his native Morocco in 1326 to go on the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca—but then kept going. By the time he returned home in 1354, he had been to China and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as to the ends of both the Islamic and Mongolian worlds: a journey of over 75,000 miles.

The window of opportunity that made such journeys possible was relatively narrow, however. By the middle of the fourteenth century, hostilities among and within various components of the Mongol Empire were making travel along the Silk Road perilous. The Mongols of the Ilkhanate, who dominated the ancient trade routes that ran through Persia, came into conflict with the Italian merchants from Genoa, who controlled trade at the western ends of the Silk Road, especially in the transport depot of Tabriz. Mounting pressures finally forced the Genoese to abandon Tabriz, thereby breaking one of the major links in the commercial chain forged by the Mongol Peace. Then, in 1346, the Mongols of the Golden Horde besieged the Genoese colony at Caffa on the Black Sea. This event simultaneously disrupted trade while becoming a conduit for the transmission of the Black Death, whose reemergence and spread within Asia had been facilitated by these interconnected networks and by the Mongol conquests (see page 33).

Over the next few decades, the medieval economy would struggle to overcome the devastating effects of the massive depopulation caused by the plague, which made recovery from these setbacks slower and harder. In the meantime, in 1368, the last Mongol rulers of China were overthrown, and most foreigners were now denied access to its borders; the remaining Mongol warriors were restricted to cavalry service in the imperial armies of the new Ming dynasty. The conditions that had fostered an integrated trans-Eurasian cultural and commercial network were no longer sustainable. Yet the view of the world that had been fostered by Mongol rule continued to exercise a lasting influence. European memories of the Far East would be preserved and embroidered, and the dream of reestablishing close

connections between Europe and China would survive to influence a new round of commercial and imperial expansion in the centuries to come.

Check Your Understanding: 1 Of 12

INCOMPLETE

Question

At its height, the Mongol Empire was the largest land empire in history. Among its conquests was

Select an Answer

- **A.** Baghdad.
- **B.** Byzantium.
- **C.** Venice.
- **D.** Poland.

Report Issue

Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 2 Of 12

INCOMPLETE

Question

The *Pax Mongolica* refers to the century-long span when connections between East Asian and Western civilizations were facilitated by Mongol dominance of the lands stretching from Moscow to the Pacific. What was one consequence of this intensified interconnectivity?

Select an Answer

- **A.** Merchants were able to travel and trade along the Silk Road for the first time.
- **B.** It facilitated the movement of merchants, missionaries, and diplomats to and from China.
- **C.** The Mongol rulers of China sought to protect their domains by denying access to foreigners.
- **D.** The Mongols sought to eliminate differences among the peoples and cultures they ruled.

Report Issue

Check Answer

THE EXTENSION OF EUROPEAN COMMERCE AND SETTLEMENT

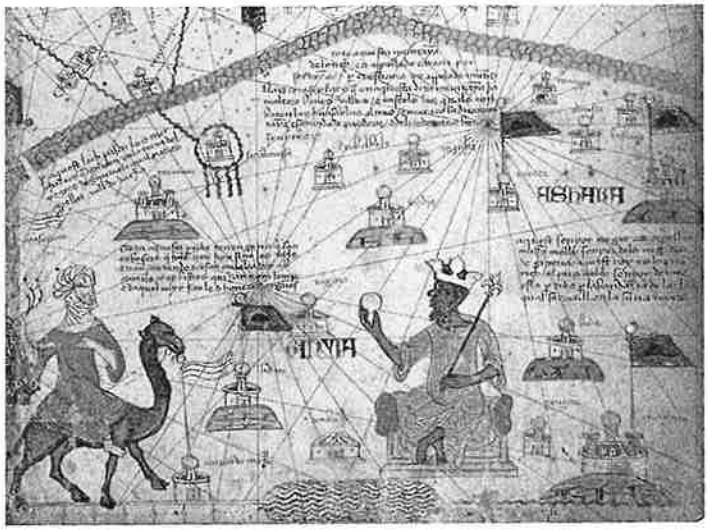
Western civilizations' increased access to the riches of the Far East during the Pax Mongolica ran parallel to a number of ventures that were extending Europeans' presence in the Mediterranean and beyond. These endeavors were both mercantile and colonial, and in many cases resulted in the control of strategic trade routes or islands by representatives of a single adventurous state.

The language of crusading, with which we have become familiar, now came to be applied to these economic and political initiatives, whose often violent methods could be justified on the grounds that they were supporting papally sanctioned Christian causes. To take one prominent example, the strategic goal of the crusades that targeted North Africa in this era was to cut the economic lifelines that supported Muslim settlements in the Holy Land. Yet the only people who stood to gain from this were the merchants who dreamed of controlling the commercial routes that ran through Egypt—those that connected North Africa to the Silk Road as well as the conduits of the sub-Saharan gold trade.

The Quest for African Gold

European commerce in African gold was not new. It had been going on for centuries, facilitated by traders whose caravans brought a steady supply from the Niger River to the North African ports of Algiers and Tunis. In the early thirteenth century, rival bands of merchants from Catalonia and Genoa had established trading colonies in Tunis to expedite this process, exchanging woolen cloth from northern Europe for both North African grain and sub-Saharan gold.

But the medieval demand for gold accelerated during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and could not be met by these established trading relationships. The luxuries coveted by Europeans were now too costly to be bought solely with bulk goods, which were, in any case, a cumbersome medium of exchange. Although precious textiles (usually silk) were a form of wealth the Mongols valued, the burgeoning economy of the medieval world demanded a reliable and abundant supply of more portable currency. For a long time, the rich silver mines of Poland and Bohemia had enabled the circulation of coinage in Europe and had furnished the means for rulers in Rus' to pay the tributes due to the Mongols. But silver production dropped markedly during the 1340s, as European engineers reached the limits of their technological capacity to extract ore from ever deeper mines; this depletion of sources of silver led to a serious cash-flow problem.



MANSA MUSA. Musa I was ruler of the wealthy West African Empire of Mali. His title, Mansa, means both "sultan" and "emperor," capturing the breadth of his power as a conqueror, king, and religious leader. He is depicted prominently in an important cartographic manuscript known as the Catalan Atlas, created in 1375 and attributed to Cresques Abraham, a Jewish artist and "master of maps" who strove to capture the contours of the entire known world. In keeping with Mansa Musa's reputation as the richest man on earth—at that time, and maybe for all time—he wears a crown of real gold leaf and holds up a gold coin. He is also shown enthroned and holding a scepter, just like a European monarch. ▪ ***How does this image, and the making of such an atlas, reflect the developments we are studying in this chapter?***

Gold was therefore an obvious alternative currency for large transactions, and in the thirteenth century some European rulers began minting gold coins. But Europe itself had few natural gold reserves, and so maintaining and expanding these currencies required new sources of gold. The most obvious source was Africa, especially Mali and Ghana—which was called the "Land of Gold" by medieval geographers. The sultan and emperor of that region, Mansa Musa (d. 1337) was known as the richest man in the world—and may have been the richest person in history. His sub-Saharan realm was also famed for its salt and ivory; the tusks of African elephants were especially prized by European artists.

Models of Mediterranean Colonization: Catalonia, Genoa, and Venice

The heightened European interest in the African gold trade, which engaged the seafaring merchants of **Genoa** and **Catalonia** in particular, coincided with these merchants' creation of entrepreneurial empires in the western Mediterranean. During the thirteenth century, Catalan adventurers conquered and colonized a series of western Mediterranean islands, including Majorca, Ibiza, Minorca, Sardinia, and Sicily. Except in Sicily, which already had a large and diverse population that included many Christians, the pattern of Catalan conquest was largely the same on all these islands: expulsion or extermination of the existing population, usually Muslim; the extension of economic concessions to attract new settlers; and a heavy reliance on slave labor to produce foodstuffs and raw materials for export.

These Catalan colonial efforts were mainly carried out by private individuals or companies operating under royal charters; the state did not actively sponsor them. They therefore contrast strongly with the established colonial practices of the maritime empire controlled by **Venice**, whose strategic ventures were focused mainly on the eastern Mediterranean, where the Venetians dominated the trade in spices and silks. Venetian colonies were administered directly by the city's rulers or by their appointed colonial governors. These colonies included long-settled civilizations such as Greece, Cyprus, and the cities of

the Dalmatian coast, meaning that Venetian administration laid just another layer on top of many other economic, cultural, and political structures.

The Genoese, to take yet another case, also had extensive interests in the western Mediterranean, where they traded bulk goods such as cloth, hides, grain, timber, and sugar. They too established trading colonies, but these tended to consist of family networks that were closely integrated with the peoples among whom they lived, whether in North Africa, Spain, or the on shores of the Black Sea.



THE CHURCH AT HVALSEY, GREENLAND. Located on the southern tip of Greenland, Hvalsey was originally a farmstead established in the late tenth century by the uncle of Eirik the Red, father of the explorer Leif Eiriksson. The church at Hvalsey, pictured here, was built in the twelfth century and was roofed with turf. It was the site of the last documented event in the history of Norse settlement on the island: a wedding that took place in 1408. By that time, the population had largely died out due to starvation and disease.

From the Mediterranean to the Atlantic

Key Characteristics of the Medieval World System and Its Consequences

▶ Transcript

For centuries, European maritime commerce had been divided between this Mediterranean world and a very different northeastern Atlantic world, which encompassed northern France, the Low Countries, the British Isles, and Scandinavia. Starting around 1270, however, Italian merchants began to sail through the Straits of Gibraltar and on up to the wool-producing regions of England and the Low Countries. This was a step toward the extension of Mediterranean patterns of commerce and colonization into the Atlantic Ocean. Another step was the discovery (or possibly the rediscovery) of the Atlantic island chains known as the Canaries and the Azores, which Genoese sailors reached in the fourteenth century.

Efforts to colonize the Canary Islands, and to convert and enslave their inhabitants, began almost immediately. Eventually, the Canaries would become the focus of a new wave of colonial settlement sponsored by the Portuguese, and the base for Portuguese voyages down the west coast of Africa. They would also be the jumping-off point from which Christopher Columbus would sail westward across the Atlantic Ocean in the hope of reaching Asia (see Chapter 12).

There was also a significant European colonial presence in the northern Atlantic—and there had been for centuries. Norse voyagers from Iceland had begun to colonize Greenland in the late tenth century and had established settlements in a place they called Vinland (the coast of Newfoundland in present-day Canada) around 1000. According to the sagas that tell the story of these explorations, written down in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a band of adventurers led by Leif Eiriksson had intended to set up a permanent colony there (see ***Analyzing Primary Sources*** on pages 16–17). Numerous expeditions resulted in the construction of houses, a fortification, and even attempts to domesticate livestock transported from Scandinavia. Yet North America did not become home to a permanent European population at this time; the sagas report that relations with indigenous peoples were fraught, and there may have been other factors hindering settlement.

However, Norse settlers did build a viable community on Greenland, which eventually formed part of the kingdom of Norway. This was facilitated by the warming of the earth's

climate between 800 and 1300—the same phenomenon that partly enabled the agricultural revolution. For several centuries, these favorable climatic conditions made it possible to sustain some farming activities on the southern coastline of that huge island, supplemented by fishing, hunting, and foraging. But with the gradual cooling of the climate in the fourteenth century, which caused famines even in the rich farmlands of Europe, this fragile ecosystem was gradually eroded and the Greenlanders died out.

Check Your Understanding: 3 Of 12 INCOMPLETE

Question

Europeans' increased demand for gold was caused by

Select an Answer

- **A.** the colonization of West Africa.
- **B.** the closure of sub-Saharan trade routes.
- **C.** the Mongols' monopoly on the gold trade.
- **D.** the lack of gold reserves in Europe and the need for a portable currency.

Report Issue Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 4 Of 12 INCOMPLETE

Question

During this period, Catalonia and Genoa joined Venice in colonizing the Mediterranean. The Genoese and the Portuguese also began to extend Mediterranean colonial projects into the eastern Atlantic. Which of the following colonial models was characteristic of the Genoese?

Select an Answer

- **A.** As individuals or as companies operating under royal charters, they tended to expel or exterminate existing local populations and to rely on slave labor.
- **B.** They established trading colonies based on family networks that were also closely integrated with local populations.
- **C.** They relied on the sponsorship of the city's rulers and local administrators appointed by them.
- **D.** They moved quickly to enslave local inhabitants.

Report Issue Check Answer

WAYS OF KNOWING AND DESCRIBING THE WORLD

The success of European commercial and colonial expansion in this era both drove and depended on significant innovations in measuring and mapping. It also coincided with intellectual, literary, and artistic initiatives that aimed to capture and describe the workings of this wider world, and to imagine its celestial (or infernal) counterparts.

Economic Tools: Balance Sheets, Banks, Charts, and Clocks

The economic boom that resulted from the integration of European and Asian commerce called for the refinement of existing business models and accounting techniques. New forms of partnership and the development of insurance contracts helped to minimize the risks associated with long-distance trading (see ***Interpreting Visual Evidence*** on pages 18–19). Double-entry bookkeeping, widely used in Italy by the mid-fourteenth century, gave merchants a much clearer picture of their profits and losses by ensuring that both credits and debits were clearly laid out in parallel columns, a practice that facilitated the balancing of accounts. The Medici family of Florence established branches of its bank in each of the major cities of Europe and were careful that the failure of one would not bankrupt the entire firm as earlier branch-banking arrangements had done. Banks also experimented with advanced credit techniques borrowed from Muslim and Jewish financiers, allowing their clients to transfer funds without any real money changing hands—and without endangering their capital by carrying it with them.

Such transfers were carried out by written receipts, the direct ancestors of the check, money order, and currency transfer.

Other late medieval technologies kept pace in different ways with the demands for increased efficiency and accuracy. Eyeglasses, first invented in the 1280s, were perfected in the fourteenth century, extending the careers of those who made a living by reading, writing, and accounting. The use of the magnetic compass helped ships sail farther away from land, making longer-distance Atlantic voyages possible for the first time. And as more and more mariners began to sail waters less familiar to them, pilots began to make and use special charts that mapped the locations of ports; called ***portolani*** (**portolan charts**), these charts also took note of prevailing winds, potential routes, good harbors, and known perils.



SCHOLAR WEARING EYEGLASSES. This fresco on the wall of a church in Treviso (northern Italy) was painted between 1351 and 1352. It shows a theologian at his desk, working on a manuscript with the aid of his newfangled spectacles.



PORTOLAN CHART. Accurate mapping was essential to the success of maritime colonial ventures in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The chart shown here is the oldest surviving example of a map used by mariners to navigate between Mediterranean ports: the word *portolan* is the term for such charts. It dates from the end of the thirteenth century, and its shape clearly indicates that it was made from an animal hide. Although parchment was extremely durable, it would slowly have worn away due to prolonged exposure to salt water and other elements—hence the rarity of this early example.

Among the many implements of modern daily life invented in this era, the most familiar are clocks. Mechanical clocks came into use shortly before 1300 and proliferated immediately thereafter. They were too large and expensive for private purchase, but towns vied with each other to install them in prominent public buildings, thus advertising municipal wealth and good governance. Mechanical timekeeping had two profound effects. One was the further stimulation of interest in complex machinery of all sorts, an interest already awakened by the widespread use of mills in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Another, more significant, outcome was the way that clocks regulated daily life. Until the advent of clocks, time was flexible. Although days had been *theoretically* divided into hours, minutes, and seconds since the time of the Sumerians, people never had a way of mapping these temporal measurements onto an actual day. Now, clocks relentlessly divided time into exact units, giving rise to new expectations about labor and productivity. People were expected to start and end work "on time," to make the most of the time spent at work, and even to equate time with money. Like the improvements in bookkeeping, timekeeping made some kinds of work more efficient, but it also created new tensions and anxieties.

Knowledge of the World and of God

In the mid-thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas had constructed a theological view of the world as rational, organized, and comprehensible to the inquiring human mind. But confidence in this picture began to wane during the fourteenth century, even before the Black Death posed a new challenge to it. Philosophers such as William of Ockham (d. c. 1348), an English member of the Franciscan order, denied that human reason could prove fundamental theological truths such as the existence of God. He argued that human knowledge of God—and hence, salvation—depends entirely on what God himself has chosen to reveal through scripture, and urged humans to investigate the natural world and better understand its laws—without positing any necessary connection between the observable properties of nature and the unknowable essence of divinity.

This philosophical position, known as *nominalism*, had its roots in the philosophy of Plato and has had an enormous impact on modern thought. The nominalists' distinction between the rational comprehensibility of the real world and the spiritual incomprehensibility of God encourages investigation of nature without reference to supernatural explanations: one of the most important foundations of the modern scientific method (see Chapter 7). Nominalism also encourages empirical observation, since it posits that knowledge of the world should rest on sensory experience rather than abstract theories. The philosophical principles laid down by these observers of the medieval world are thus fundamental to modern science.

Creating God's World in Art

Just as a fascination with the natural world informed developments in medieval science, the artists of this era were paying close attention to the way plants, animals, and human beings really looked. Carvings of leaves and flowers were increasingly made from direct observation and are clearly recognizable to modern botanists as distinct species. Statues of humans also became more realistic in their portrayals of facial expressions and bodily proportions. According to a story in circulation around 1290, a sculptor working on a likeness of the German emperor allegedly made a hurried return trip to study his subject's face a second time, because he had heard that a new wrinkle had appeared on the emperor's brow.

This trend toward naturalism extended to manuscript illumination and painting as well. The latter was, to a large extent, a new art. Wall paintings are among the oldest forms of artistic expression in human history, and throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages artists had decorated the walls of public and private buildings with frescoes (paintings executed on "fresh," wet plaster). Italian artists in the thirteenth century began to adapt the techniques used by icon painters in Byzantium, making freestanding pictures on pieces of wood or canvas using tempera (pigments mixed with water and natural gums) in addition to frescoes. Because these altarpieces, devotional images, and portraits were portable, they were also more commercial. As long as artists could afford the necessary materials, they did not have to wait for specific commissions. This meant that they had more freedom to choose their subject matter and to put an individual stamp on their work—one of the reasons that we know the names of many more artists from this era.

Analyzing Primary Sources

Vikings Encounter the Natives of North America

Although Norse voyagers had explored and settled the coast of Newfoundland around the year 1000, written accounts of these exploits were not made or widely circulated until the thirteenth century. The following excerpt comes from one of these narrative histories, the Grænlendinga Saga *(Greenlanders' Saga). Its hero is Thorfinn Karlsefni, a Norwegian adventurer who arrives in Greenland and marries Gudrid, the twice-widowed sister-in-law of the explorer Leif Eiriksson. Leif had established the original colony of Vinland but had since returned to Greenland.*

There was still the same talk about Vinland voyages as before, and everyone, including [his wife] Gudrid, kept urging Karlsefni to make the voyage. In the end he decided to sail and gathered a company of sixty men and five women. He made an agreement with his crew that everyone should share equally in whatever profits the expedition might yield. They took livestock of all kinds, for they intended to make a permanent settlement there if possible.

Karlsefni asked Leif if he could have the houses in Vinland; Leif said that he was willing to lend them, but not to give them away.

They put to sea and arrived safe and sound at Leif's houses and carried their hammocks ashore. Soon they had plenty of good supplies, for a fine big rorqual* was driven ashore; they went down and cut it up, and so there was no shortage of food.

The livestock were put out to grass, and soon the male beasts became very frisky and difficult to manage. They had brought a bull with them.

Karlsefni ordered timber to be felled and cut into lengths for a cargo for the ship, and it was left out on a rock to season. They made use of all the natural resources of the country that were available, grapes and game of all kinds and other produce.

The first winter passed into summer, and then they had their first encounter with Skrælings,† when a great number of them came out of the wood one day. The cattle were grazing near by and the bull began to bellow and roar with great vehemence. This terrified the Skrælings and they fled, carrying their packs which contained furs and sables and pelts of all kinds. They made for Karlsefni's houses and tried to get inside, but Karlsefni had the doors barred against them. Neither side could understand the other's language.

Then the Skrælings put down their packs and opened them up and offered their contents, preferably in exchange for weapons; but Karlsefni forbade his men to sell arms. Then he hit on the idea of telling the women to carry milk out to the Skrælings, and when the Skrælings saw the milk they wanted to buy nothing else. And so the outcome of their trading expedition was that the Skrælings carried their purchases away in their bellies, and left their packs and furs with Karlsefni and his men.

After that, Karlsefni ordered a strong wooden palisade to be erected round the houses, and they settled in.

About this time Karlsefni's wife, Gudrid, gave birth to a son, and he was named Snorri.

Early next winter the Skrælings returned, in much greater numbers this time, bringing with them the same kind of wares as before. Karlsefni told the women, "You must carry out to them the same produce that was most in demand last time, and nothing else." . . .

[B]ut a Skræling was killed by one of Karlsefni's men for trying to steal some weapons. The Skrælings fled as fast as they could, leaving their clothing and wares behind . . .

"Now we must devise a plan," said Karlsefni, "for I expect they will pay us a third visit, and this time with hostility and in greater numbers. This is what we must do: ten men are to go out on the headland here and make themselves conspicuous, and the rest of us are to go into the wood and make a clearing there, where we can keep our cattle when the Skrælings come out of the forest. We shall take our bull and keep him to the fore."

The place where they intended to have their encounter with the Skrælings had the lake on one side and the woods on the other.

Karlsefni's plan was put into effect, and the Skrælings came right to the place that Karlsefni had chosen for the battle. The fighting began, and many of the Skrælings were killed. There was one tall and handsome man among the Skrælings and Karlsefni reckoned that he must be their leader. One of the Skrælings had picked up an axe, and after examining it for a moment he swung it at a man standing beside him, who fell dead at once. The tall man then took hold of the axe, looked at it for a moment, and then threw it as far as he could out into the water. Then the Skrælings fled into the forest as fast as they could, and that was the end of the encounter.

Karlsefni and his men spent the whole winter there, but in the spring he announced that he had no wish to stay there any longer and wanted to return to Greenland. They made ready for the voyage and took with them much valuable produce, vines and grapes and pelts. They put to sea and reached Eiriksfjord safely and spent the winter there.

Source: Magnus Magnusson and Herman Palsson, *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America* (Penguin, 1965), pp. 65–67.

Questions for Analysis

1. What policies did the Norse settlers adopt toward the native peoples they encountered on the coast of Newfoundland? How effective were they?
2. Knowing their extensive preparations for colonization and the success of their early efforts, why do you think Karlsefni and his companions abandoned their settlement in North America? Can you find clues in the text?
3. Compare this encounter with the sources describing other interactions between Europeans and the indigenous inhabitants of the New World after 1492 (see Chapters 3 and 5). How do you account for any similarities? What are some key differences?

One of these, Giotto di Bondone of Florence (c. 1267–1337), painted both walls and portable wooden panels. Like some of his contemporaries, **Giotto** (*gee-OHT-toh*) was preeminently an imitator of nature. Not only do his human beings and animals look lifelike, they seem to do natural things. When Christ enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, boys climb trees to get a better view; when Saint Francis is laid out in death, someone checks to see whether he has really received the *stigmata* (the marks of Christ's wounds); and when the Virgin's parents, Joachim and Anna, meet after a long separation, they embrace and kiss one another tenderly. Although many of the artists who came after Giotto moved away from naturalism, this style would become the norm by 1400. For this reason, Giotto is often regarded as a painter who inspired the Italian Renaissance (Chapter 2).

A Vision of the World We Cannot See

An exact contemporary of Giotto's had a different way of capturing the spiritual world in a naturalistic way, and he worked in a different medium. **Dante Alighieri** (1265–1321) of Florence pioneered what he called a "sweet new style" of poetry in his native tongue, which was now so different from the Latin of antiquity that it had become a language in its own right. Yet, as a scholar and devotee of classical Latin verse, Dante also strove to make this Italian vernacular an instrument for serious political and social critique. His great work, known in his own day as the *Comedy* (called the *Divine Comedy* by later admirers) was composed during the years he spent in exile from his beloved city, after the political party he supported was ousted from power in 1301.

The *Comedy* describes the poet's imaginary journey

through hell, purgatory, and paradise; a journey that begins in a "dark wood," a metaphor for the personal and political crises that threatened Dante's faith and livelihood. In the poem, the narrator is led out of this forest and through the first two realms (hell and purgatory) by the Roman poet Virgil, who represents the best of classical culture. But Dante can be guided toward knowledge of the divine in Paradise only by his deceased beloved, Beatrice, who symbolizes Christian wisdom.

Interpreting Visual Evidence

Seals: Signs of Identity and Authority

For much of human history, applying a seal to a document was the way to certify its legality and identify the people who had ratified it. During antiquity and the early Middle Ages, those people were only powerful men—kings, bishops, heads of monasteries—and occasionally powerful women. But as participation in documentary practices became more and more common, seals were increasingly used by corporations (such as universities and crusading orders), towns, and many individuals. The devices (images) and legends (writing) on these seals were carefully chosen to capture central attributes of their owners' personalities or status. A seal was made by pressing a deeply incised lead matrix onto hot wax or resin, which would quickly dry to form a durable impression. The images reproduced here are later engravings that make the features of the original seals easier to see.



A. Seal of the town of Dover, 1281. Dover has long been one of the busiest and most important port cities of England because of its strategic proximity to France; indeed, the Dover Strait that separates this town from Calais, just across the English Channel, is only twenty-one miles wide. In 1281, when this seal was used, ferries and other ships like the one depicted here made this crossing several times a day. The legend around the edges of the seal reads (in Latin) "Seal of the commune of barons of Dover." It reflects the high status accorded to the free men of Dover by the English crown: because of their crucial role in the economy and defense of the kingdom, they were considered a corporate body and entitled to representation in Parliament alongside individual barons.



B. Personal seal of Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester, 1258. Simon de Montfort (c. 1208–1265) was a French nobleman who rose to a position of great power in England. In 1238, he married Eleanor, sister of King Henry III: a match that was opposed by England's great lords because it gave this foreigner a great deal of power. Indeed, Simon would later use that power to lead a rebellion against his royal brother-in-law, dying on the battlefield in 1265. This image was appended to a document made when Simon was fifty, but it shows him as a courtly youth, riding out with his favorite hound and blowing on a hunting horn. This means that Simon had continued to use a seal made for him when he was a much younger man, probably at the time when he was knighted, many years before, in France. The Latin legend, indeed, makes no mention of his English title: "Seal of Simon de Montfort."

Questions for Analysis

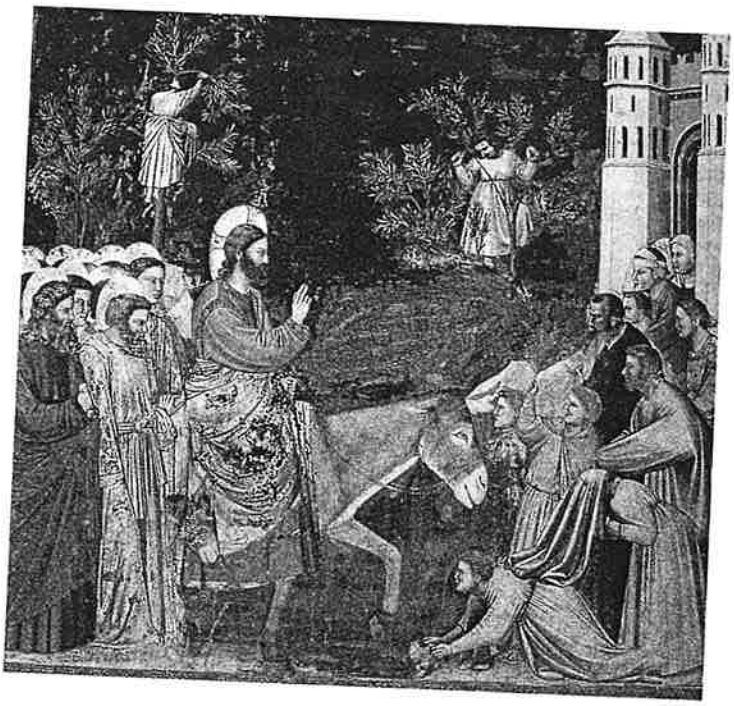
1. Medieval towns represented themselves in a variety of ways on their seals: sometimes showing a group portrait of town councilors, sometimes a local saint, sometimes a heraldic beast, and sometimes distinctive architectural features. Why would Dover choose this image (A)? What messages does this seal convey?
2. Think carefully about the mystery of Simon de Montfort's seal (B). Usually, powerful men and women had new seals made to reflect their elevated status. What are all the possible reasons that the English earl would have continued to use a seal made for him so many years earlier, in France? What are the possible ramifications of this choice?
3. The seals of medieval women were almost always shaped like almonds (pointed ovals; the technical term is *vesica-shaped*). Yet Helwig's seal is round, like the seals

of men and corporations (C). Why might that be the case?

4. In general, what is the value of seals for the study of history? What are the various ways in which they function as sources?



C. Seal of Helwig von Ysenburg, countess of Büdingen, 1274. Unlike the engravings of seals pictured here, this is an original wax impression of Helwig's seal and includes the silken cords that were used to fasten it to a document in 1274. It shows a slim, young lady in a long, elegant gown and cape, pointed shoes, and an elaborate headdress. The falcon on her fist suggests that she is dressed to go hunting, but she is depicted against an interior background of diamond-shaped tiles—like her dress, a sign of wealth and status. The legend is difficult to decipher, but reads "Seal of Helwig von Ysen[burg]."



GIOTTO'S *ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.* This fresco by the great painter Giotto di Bondone of Florence exemplifies a new artistic attention to the realistic portrayal of the natural world and human relationships. Here, Giotto depicts Christ's arrival in Jerusalem, surrounded by his disciples. But what draws the eye are the excited boys climbing nearby trees and the thronging crowd of townspeople rushing to spread their garments on the ground. ▪ ***What human characteristics and emotions does this painting convey to the veiewer?***

In the course of this visionary pilgrimage, Dante's narrator meets the souls of many historical personages and contemporaries, and questions them closely, inviting them to explain why they met their fates. This was Dante's ingenious way of commenting on current events and passing judgment on his enemies. In many ways, this monumental poem is a fusion of classical and Christian cultures, Latin learning, and vernacular artistry.

Check Your Understanding: 5 Of 12

INCOMPLETE

Question

The English Franciscan philosopher William of Ockham departed from earlier teachers, such as Thomas Aquinas, by arguing that

Select an Answer

- **A.** human reason is capable of understanding even divine mysteries.
- **B.** there is no way of proving scientific truths, since there is usually some more divine or supernatural explanation for what we perceive with our senses.
- **C.** human reason cannot prove theological truths and should instead be used to study the natural world.
- **D.** we cannot truly know anything about the workings of the natural world.

Report Issue

Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 6 Of 12 INCOMPLETE

Question

In addition to producing naturalistic paintings that emphasized realistic human behaviors and emotions, the artists of this era were also innovative in

Select an Answer

- **A.** their rejection of traditional religious imagery.
- **B.** their refusal to subordinate themselves to patrons.
- **C.** purchasing their own materials and producing portable wood or canvas works.
- **D.** abandoning traditional methods of wall painting.

Report Issue Check Answer

PAPAL POWER AND POPULAR PIETY

Dante's *Comedy* was a creative response to the political turmoil that engulfed Italy during his lifetime, a situation that was transforming the papacy in ways that he condemned. Indeed, many of the men whom Dante imaginatively placed in Hell were popes, those who had held high offices in the Church, foreign rulers (such as the Holy Roman Emperor) who sought to subjugate Italian territories, or rapacious Italian princes and factional leaders who fought among themselves—all who were creating a state of permanent warfare among and within cities, as in Dante's native Florence. But despite the weakening authority of the papal office, which caused violent divisions within the Church, popular piety arguably achieved its strongest expressions during this era.

The Limits of Papal Power

Reasons for the Papacy's Loss of Prestige and Its Potential Consequences

▶ Transcript

The power of the papacy reached a new height at the beginning of the thirteenth century, as holders of the office continued to centralize the government of the Church. But they also attempted to extend their influence further into the secular sphere, which led to protracted political struggles that ultimately compromised the papacy's credibility.

For example, the Italian territories under papal lordship shared a border with the kingdom of Sicily, which comprised the important city of Naples, all of southern Italy, and the island of Sicily. The ruler of these territories was also the German emperor Frederick II, who proved a formidable opponent of the papacy's expanded powers. The reigning pope, therefore, called a crusade against him. But in order to implement this crusade, the pope needed to find a military champion willing to lead an army against a fellow Christian ruler—someone with little to lose and everything to gain.

This turned out to be Charles of Anjou, who, as the youngest brother of the French king, had few resources of his own. Charles was eventually crowned king of Sicily, but he made matters in southern Italy worse by antagonizing his own subjects, who instead offered their allegiance to the king of Aragon. The papacy then made Aragon the target of yet another crusade, resulting in a disastrous war among Christian princes and their armies on European soil. In the wake of this debacle, the French king **Philip IV** (r. 1286–1314) resolved to punish the papacy for abusing its powers.

In 1300, Pope **Boniface VIII** (r. 1294–1303) called for the celebration of a papal jubilee, asserting that Rome was the center of the Christian world and that the pope was the arbiter of all power. But just a few years later, Rome had ceased to matter. The new capital of the Christian world was now in France, because Philip IV had challenged Boniface to prove that he could exercise real power—not just the power of propaganda. Following a heated dispute about the king's capacity to intervene in the affairs of the Church, Philip sent his thugs to the papal residence, where Boniface (then in his seventies) was so mistreated that he died a month later. Philip then pressed his advantage. He forced the new pope, Clement V, to thank him publicly for

his zealous defense of the faith and then, in 1309, he moved the entire papal court from Rome to **Avignon** (AH-*vee-nyon*), a city near the southeastern border of his own realm.

The papacy's capitulation to French royal power illustrates the enormous gap that had opened up between rhetoric and reality in the centuries since the Investiture Conflict. Although Boniface was merely repeating the old claim that kings ruled only by divine approval as recognized by the Church, the Church now exercised its authority only by bowing to the superior power of a king.

The Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy

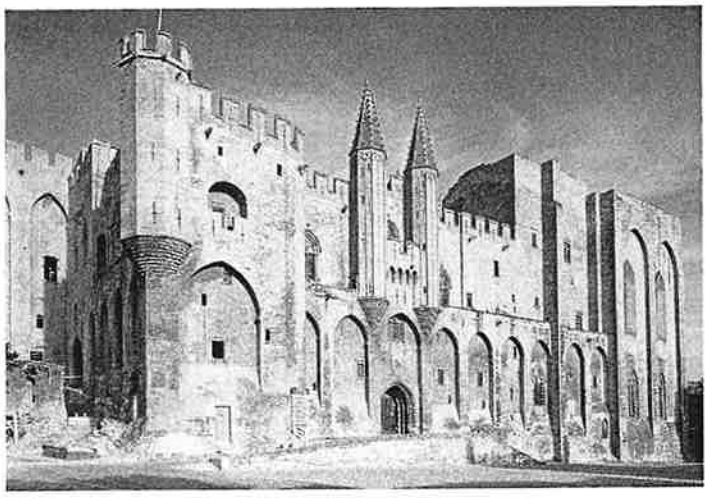
The papacy would remain in Avignon for nearly seventy years, until 1378 (see Chapter 2). This period is often called the "**Babylonian Captivity**" of the papacy, recalling the Jews' exile in Babylon during the sixth century B.C.E. Even though the move was probably supposed to be temporary, it was not reversed after Philip IV's death in 1314. Perhaps many papal suppliants found that doing business in Avignon was easier than in Rome. Not only was Avignon closer to the major centers of power in northwestern Europe, it was now far removed from the tumultuous politics of Italy and safe from the aggressive attentions of German emperors.

All of these considerations were important for a succession of popes closely allied with the aims of the French monarchy. In time, Avignon began to feel like home to them. In fact, it *was* home for all the popes elected there, who were natives of the region, as were nearly all the cardinals whom they appointed. This further cemented their loyalty to the French king. And the longer the papacy stayed in Avignon, the larger its bureaucracy grew and the harder it was to contemplate moving it.

Although the papacy never abandoned its claims to the overlordship of Rome and the Papal States, making good on these claims required decades of diplomacy and a great deal of money. The Avignon popes accordingly imposed new taxes and obligations on the wealthy dioceses of France, England, Germany, and Spain. Judicial cases from ecclesiastical courts also brought large revenues into the papal coffers. Most controversially, the Avignon popes claimed the right to appoint bishops and priests to vacant

offices anywhere in Christendom, directly bypassing the rights of individual dioceses and allowing the papacy to collect huge fees from successful appointees.

By these and other measures, the Avignon popes further strengthened administrative control over the Church. But they also further weakened the papacy's moral authority. Stories of the court's unseemly luxury circulated widely, especially during the reign of the notoriously corrupt Clement VI (r. 1342–1352), who openly sold spiritual benefits for money (boasting that he would appoint a jackass to a bishopric if he thought it would turn a profit) and who insisted that his sexual transgressions were therapeutic. His reign also coincided with the Black Death, the terrifying and demoralizing effects of which were not alleviated by the quality of his leadership.



THE PAPAL PALACE AT AVIGNON. The work on this great fortified palace was begun in 1339 and symbolizes the apparent permanence of the papal residence in Avignon. ▪ ***Why was it constructed as a fortress as well as a palace?***

Manifesting Faith: The Power of Sacraments

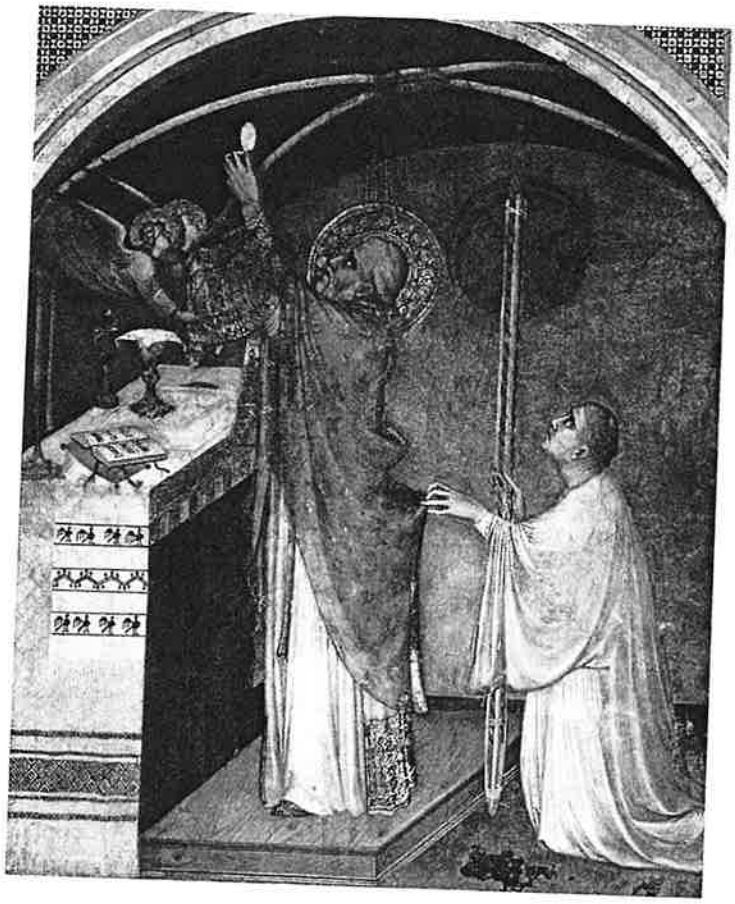
Despite the centralizing power of the papacy, which came to fruition under Innocent III, most medieval Christians experienced the Church at a local level, within their communities. In something of a paradox, this was another of Innocent III's legacies: nearly all of Europe was covered by a network of parish churches by the end of the thirteenth century because he had insisted that all people should have access to religious instruction. In these churches, parish

priests not only taught the elements of Christian doctrine but also administered the **sacraments**: rituals that conveyed the grace of God to individual Christians by marking significant moments in the life cycle of every person and significant times in the Christian calendar.

Medieval piety came to revolve around these sacraments, which included baptism, confession of sins (also known as Penance), Extreme Unction (last rites for the dying), the ordination of priests, and the Eucharist or Mass. Baptism, a ceremony of initiation that had been administered to adults in the early centuries of Christianity, had become a sacrament administered to infants as soon as possible after birth to safeguard their souls in case of an early death. Periodic confession of sins to a priest was thought to guarantee God's forgiveness, for if a sinner did not perform appropriate acts of penance, he or she would have to complete atonement in Purgatory—the netherworld between Paradise and Hell that Dante explored. (Purgatory's existence was confirmed as a Church doctrine for the first time in 1274.) In Extreme Unction, a priest anointed the forehead of a dying person with holy oil, signifying the final absolution of all sins and thus offering a last assurance of salvation. Another sacrament, marriage, was increasingly emphasized but very seldom practiced as a ceremony at this time; in reality, marriage required only the exchange of promises and was often formed simply by an act of sexual intercourse or by cohabitation.

This sacramental system was the foundation on which the practices of medieval popular piety rested. Pilgrimages, for example, were a form of penance and could shorten the pilgrim's time in Purgatory. Crusading was a kind of extreme pilgrimage that promised complete fulfillment of all penances the crusader might owe for all the sins of his life. Many other pious acts—saying a series of prayers or giving alms to the poor—could also serve as penance for one's sins, while constituting good works that would help the believer in his or her journey toward salvation.

The Miracle of the Eucharist



"THIS IS MY BODY": THE ELEVATION OF THE HOST. This fresco from a chapel in Assisi was painted by Simone Martini in the 1320s. It shows the moment in the Mass when the priest raises the eucharistic host so that it can be seen by the faithful. The Latin phrase spoken at this moment, *Hoc est enim corpus meum* ("This is indeed my body"), was regarded as transforming the substance of bread into the divine substance of Christ's body. ▪ ***Since medieval Christians believed that the sight of the host was just as powerful as ingesting it, how would they have responded to this life-size image of the elevation?*** ▪ ***What does the appearance of angels (above the altar) signify?***

Of these sacraments, the one most central to the religious lives of medieval Christians was the Eucharist, or Mass. The ritual power of the Mass was greatly enhanced in the twelfth century, when the Church began promoting the doctrine of transubstantiation. Christians attending Mass were taught that when the priest spoke the ritual words "This is my body" and "This is my blood," the substances of bread and wine on the altar were miraculously transformed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. To consume one or both of these substances was to ingest holiness. So powerful was this idea that most Christians received the sacramental

bread just once a year, at Easter; some holy women, however, attempted to sustain themselves by consuming only the single morsel of bread consecrated at daily Mass.

To share in the miracle of the Eucharist, one did not even have to consume it. One had only to witness the elevation of the host, the wafer of bread raised up by the priest, which "hosted" the real presence of Jesus Christ. Daily attendance at Mass simply to view the consecration of the host was therefore a common form of devotion, and this was facilitated by the practice of displaying a consecrated wafer in a special reliquary called a monstrance ("showcase"), which could be set up on an altar or carried through the streets. Believers sometimes attributed astonishing properties to the eucharistic host, feeding it to sick animals or rushing from church to church to see the consecrated bread as many times as possible in a day. The Church criticized some of these practices as superstitious, but by and large, these expressions of popular piety were encouraged and fervently practiced by many.

The Pursuit of Holiness

The fundamental theme of preachers in this era, that salvation lay open to any Christian who strove for it, helps to explain the central place of the Mass and other sacraments in daily life. It also led many to seek out new paths that could lead to God. Some believers who sought to achieve a mystical union with God (through rigorous prayer, penance, and personal sacrifice) were ultimately condemned for heresy because they did not subordinate themselves to the authority of the Church. But even less radical figures might find themselves treading on dangerous ground, especially if they published their ideas.

For example, the German preacher Master Eckhart (c. 1260–1327), a Dominican friar, taught that there is a "spark" deep within every human soul and that God lives in this spark. Through prayer and self-renunciation, any person could therefore retreat into this inner recess of his or her being and access divinity. This conveyed the message that laypeople could attain salvation through their own efforts, without the intervention of a priest or any of the sacraments he alone could perform. As a result, many of Eckhart's teachings were condemned. But such views found support

in the teachings of popular preachers after the Black Death, when close-knit communities revolving around the parish church were broken up or weakened (see Chapter 2).

Check Your Understanding: 7 Of 12

INCOMPLETE

Question

We have seen, in this and in previous chapters, that calls for crusade were often directed against fellow Christians as well as "pagan" or Muslim enemies. This began to cause problems leading up to the reign of Pope Boniface VIII because

Select an Answer

- **A.** crusaders were constantly losing to larger armies of Muslim warriors.
- **B.** secular rulers denied that the papacy had any right to call a crusade.
- **C.** Christians were becoming convinced that warfare was futile and immoral.
- **D.** the papacy had repeatedly pitted Christians against one another to serve its own ends.

Report Issue

Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 8 Of 12

INCOMPLETE

Question

Beginning with King Philip IV of France, the papacy endured a "Babylonian Captivity" in Avignon. Although this further weakened the moral and spiritual authority of the Church, it also

Select an Answer

- **A.** possibly made it easier for many to do business with the papacy.
- **B.** gave the papacy an excuse to abandon its claims to territory in Italy.
- **C.** made the office of the pope more accessible to a wider and more diverse range of candidates.
- **D.** signaled that the move would be very temporary.

Report Issue

Check Answer

STRUGGLES FOR SOVEREIGNTY

When the French king Philip IV transplanted the papal court from Rome to Avignon, he was not just responding to previous popes' abuse of power; he was bolstering his own. By the middle of the thirteenth century, the growth of strong territorial monarchies, combined with the increasing sophistication of royal justice, taxation, and propaganda, had given some secular rulers greater power than any European ruler had wielded since the time of Charlemagne.

Meanwhile, monarchs' willingness to support the Church's crusading efforts not only yielded distinct economic and political advantages but also allowed them to assert their commitment to the moral and spiritual improvement of their realms. Although a king still needed to be anointed with holy oil at the time of his coronation in order to claim that he ruled "by the grace of God"—a rite that required a bishop and, by extension, papal support—a king's authority in his own realm rested on the acquiescence of the aristocracy and on the popular perception of his reputation for justice, piety, and regard for his subjects' prosperity. On the wider stage of the medieval world, it also rested on his successful assertion of his kingdom's sovereignty.

The Problem of Sovereignty

The Concept of Sovereignty and Its Importance

▶ Transcript

Sovereignty can be defined as an inviolable authority over a defined territory. In 1190, Philip Augustus became the first monarch to call himself "king of France" and not "king of the Franks." In other words, he was defining his kingship in geographical terms, claiming that there was an entity called France and that he was king within that area.

But what was France? Was it the tiny "island" (Île-de-France) around Paris, which had been his father's domain? If so, France was very small—and very vulnerable, which would make it hard to maintain a claim to sovereignty. Or did France include any region, such as Champagne or Normandy, whose lord was willing to do homage to the French king? In that case, the king would need to enforce his rights of lordship constantly and, if necessary, exert his rule directly—as Philip did when he took Normandy away from England's King John in 1214.

But what if some of France's neighboring lords ruled in their own right, as did the independent counts of Flanders, thus threatening the security of France's borders? In that case, the king would need either to forge an alliance with these borderlands or to negate their independence. He would need to assert his sovereignty by absorbing these regions into an ever-growing kingdom.

This is the problem: a claim to sovereignty is credible only if it can be backed up with real power, and a state's or ruler's power must never seem stagnant or passive. The problem of sovereignty, then, is a zero-sum game: one state's sovereignty is won and maintained by diminishing that of other states. Although many French citizens today would assert that France has, in some mystical way, always existed in its present form, the fact is that France and many other modern European states were being cobbled together during the medieval period through a process of annexation and colonization—just as the United States was assembled at the expense of the empires that had colonized North America (the British, French, and Spanish), not to mention the killing or displacement of autonomous native peoples.

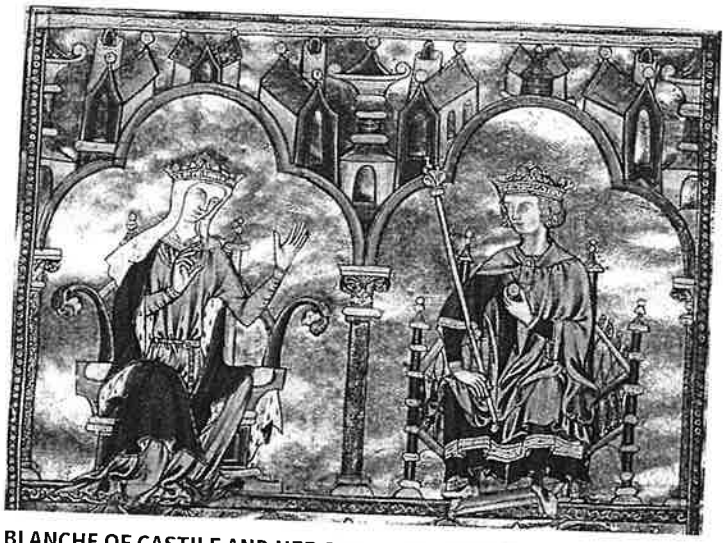
The process of achieving sovereignty is thus an aggressive and often violent one, affecting not only the rulers of territories but their peoples, too. In Spain, the

"reconquest" of Muslim lands, which had accelerated in the twelfth century, continued apace in the thirteenth and fourteenth to the detriment of these regions' Muslim and Jewish inhabitants. German princes continued to push northward into the Baltic, where they responded with brutal force to native peoples' resistance. Meanwhile, the Scandinavian kingdoms that had been forming in the eleventh and twelfth centuries warred among themselves and their neighbors for the control of contested regions and resources. Italy and the Mediterranean became a constant battleground, as we have observed.

Among all these emerging states, the two most strident and successful in their assertion of sovereignty were France and England.

The Prestige of France: The Saintly Kingship of Louis IX

After the death of Philip Augustus in 1223, the heirs to the French throne continued to pursue an expansionist policy, pushing the boundaries of their influence out to the east and south. There were significant pockets of resistance, though, notably from the southwestern lands that the kings of England had inherited from Eleanor of Aquitaine and from the independent towns of Flanders that had escaped conquest under Philip Augustus. In 1302, citizen militias from several of these towns, fighting on foot with farming implements and other unconventional weapons, managed to defeat the heavily armed French cavalry. This victory at the Battle of Courtrai (Kortrijk) is still celebrated as a national holiday in Belgium (although its ultimate meaning is currently at the center of a divisive controversy between French- and Flemish-speaking Belgians).



BLANCHE OF CASTILE AND HER SON, KING LOUIS IX. Blanche was a granddaughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and daughter of King Alfonso VII of Castile and his queen, Eleanor of England. Well-educated and politically savvy, Blanche became the *de facto* ruler of France when her husband, King Louis VIII, died—leaving her to raise her children and secure the throne for her son, Louis IX, who was only 12 years old at the time. That fact that she did so successfully would pave the way for Louis' successful reign. Here, in a contemporary illumination, mother and son sit enthroned as equals in their palace in Paris. Their gestures show that Blanche is offering her son advice and instruction, which he gladly receives.

This defeat was a setback for Philip IV of France, but we have already observed that he had other ways of asserting the power of French sovereignty. Much of that power derived from his grandfather, **Louis IX** (r. 1226–1270), who probably would have been horrified by the ways his grandson used it. Louis was famous for his piety and his conscientious exercise of his kingly duties. Unlike most of his fellow princes, Louis not only pledged to go on a crusade —he actually went. And although both of his campaigns were notorious failures (he died on the second, in 1270), they cemented his saintly reputation and political clout.

First, Louis's willingness to risk his life (and those of his brothers) in the service of the Church would give him tremendous influence in papal affairs—a key factor in making his youngest brother, Charles of Anjou, the king of Naples and Sicily. Second, the necessity of ensuring the good governance of his kingdom during his years of absence prompted Louis to invent or reform many key aspects of royal governance, which made France the bureaucratic rival of England for the first time. Third, Louis's first crusading

venture was seen as confirmation that the king of France had inherited the mantle of Charlemagne as the protector of the Church and the representative of Christ on earth.

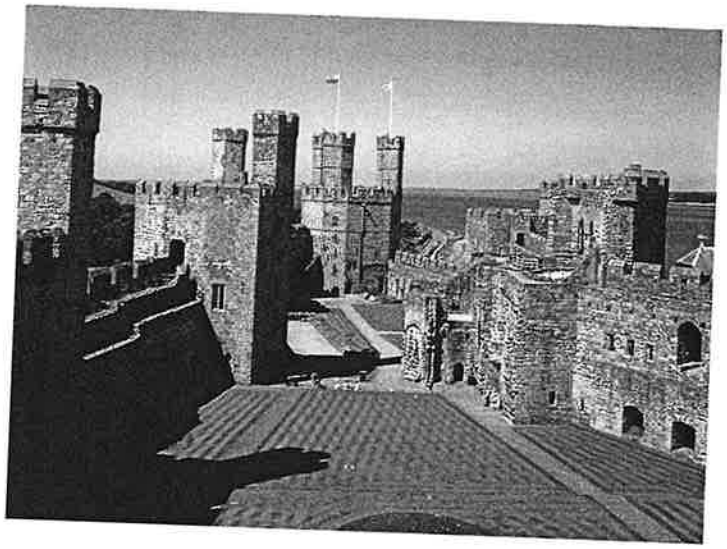
Although it was a military fiasco, this crusade found lasting artistic expression in the Sainte-Chapelle (Holy Chapel), a gorgeous jewel box of a church that Louis built in Paris for his collection of Passion relics—artifacts thought to have been used for the torture and crucifixion of Christ (the Latin *passio* means "suffering"). The most important of these was the Crown of Thorns, intended by Pilate as a mocking reference to "the king of the Jews." Now that this holy crown belonged to Louis and was housed in Paris, it could be taken as a sign that Paris was the new Jerusalem.

Widely regarded as a saint in his lifetime, Louis was formally canonized in 1297, by the same Pope Boniface VIII who was brought down by Philip IV. Indeed, Boniface partly intended this gesture as a rebuke to the saint's grandson, but Philip turned it to his advantage. He even used his grandfather's pious reputation as a cloak for his frankly rapacious treatment of the Knights Templar, whose military order he suppressed in 1314 so that he could confiscate its extensive property and dissolve his own debts to the order. He had expelled the Jews from his realm in 1306 for similar reasons.

Castles and Control: Edward I and the Expansion of English Rule

The expulsion of Jews who depended on a king's personal protection had actually been a precedent set by Philip's contemporary and kinsman, **Edward I** of England (r. 1272–1307). Unlike Philip, Edward had to build up the sovereignty of his state almost from scratch—for his father, Henry III (r. 1216–1272), had a long but troubled reign. Henry inherited the throne as a young boy, shortly after his father John's loss of Normandy and capitulation to Magna Carta. From the first, he had to contend with factions among his regents and, later, the restive barons of his realm who rose against him on several occasions. His son Edward even sided with the rebels at one point, but later worked alongside his father to suppress them. When Edward himself became king in 1272, he took steps to ensure that there would be no further revolts on his watch by tightening his control on the

aristocracy and their lands, diffusing their power by strengthening that of Parliament, reforming the administration of the realm, and clarifying its laws.



CAERNARVON CASTLE. One of many massive fortifications built by Edward I, this castle was the birthplace of the first English Prince of Wales and the site where the current Prince of Wales, Charles, was formally invested with that title in 1969. ▪ ***Castles of this size and strength had been constructed in the Crusader States and on the disputed frontiers of Muslim and Christian Spain, but never before in Britain. What does their construction reveal about Edward's attitude toward the Welsh?***

Having seen to the internal affairs of England, Edward looked to its borders. Since Welsh chieftains had been major backers of the barons who had rebelled against his father, he was determined to clean up the border region and bring "wild Wales" within the orbit of English sovereignty. He initially attempted to do this by making treaties with various Welsh princes, but none of these arrangements was stable or gave him the type of control he wanted. Edward accordingly embarked on an ambitious and ruthless campaign of castle building, ringing the hilly country with enormous fortifications on a scale not seen in most of Europe—they were more like crusader castles—and treated the Welsh (who were actually his fellow Christians) as infidels. Indeed, he treated conquered Wales like a crusader state, making it a settler colony and subjecting the Welsh to the overlordship of his own men. When his son, the future

Edward II, was born in 1284 at the great castle he had built at Caernarvon, he gave the infant the title "Prince of Wales," a title usually borne by a Welsh chieftain.

Analyzing Primary Sources

A Girl Raised as a Boy: The Story of Silence

Surviving in a single illustrated manuscript, the Roman de Silence, *the "romance" or story about Silence, is a remarkable literary artifact testifying to the complexity of medieval gender roles, as well as conflicting attitudes toward disguise and deception, sexuality, women's social and legal status, and the factors that affect a person's identity and destiny. Composed in the first half of the thirteenth century, it is attributed to a pseudonymous author called Heldris of Cornwall, written in a dialect of Old French from northeastern France. Its protagonist is the daughter of a nobleman and his wife who decide to raise the child as a boy because the fictional king of England has outlawed female inheritance. They choose the name "Silence" to indicate that their deception must remain a secret. In the following passage, Silence has realized that they are female. This scene is immediately followed by a debate between Nature and Nurture over Silence's true gender. The changing pronouns are original to the text.*

And when this child was of an age
to understand he was a maid,
his father gave the reason why,
explaining how they came to lie,
that his true sex might be concealed. [. . .]
"My sweet, fair son: it was for you
that we did this, not for us two.
Now that you know, my son, be sure
to keep this secret thing secure.
Upon your honor: tell no one."
And he replied, like a good son:
"Don't fear, when all is said and done,
With God's help, I will do my best
To hide myself from all the rest." [. . .]
The seneschal, to make him fit
and to improve his horsemanship
through woods and streams took him to ride,
and all throughout that countryside:
in frost and heat, bright day and dim,
in quest to make a man of him.

To such men's ways he was so used,
and those of women so refused,
that he lacked nothing of a male:

no one could see he wasn't male.
Yet all's not what it seems to be:
beneath the clothes, he is a she. [. . .]
And by the time of his twelfth year
there was no one he could not beat
when challenged to a wrestling meet,
in jousting, or in skirmishing.
Alone he kept his peers trembling.
Silence was disturbed by this,
for in their heart they knew that it
had happened through deceitful means.
And just when they had reached their teens,
Nature came and, grumbling,
said, "Look, this is the strangest thing,
that you behave now like a male,
going about in wind and hail,
when with my very special brand
I formed you with my own two hands,
and all the pretty tricks I knew
I laid on thick when I made you!
A thousand people now curse me
for wasting on you such beauty
because away from them I took
such loveliness to make your looks." [. . .]
So Nature said, "Get going, go!
Get to your chamber, learn to sew—
for that's what Nature's law demands!
You are not Silence, not a man!" [. . .]
Now who should enter but Nurture,
who saw what went on with Nature,
and said to him, "What's going on?"
And he said, "Nature says I'm wrong,
and maybe after all it's true
that I've not done what I should do,
that this is not what I should be,
that I've behaved unnaturally." [. . .]
Now, do you think, when Nurture heard,
that she was happy with these words?
No way! Instead, she shook with rage
toward Nature while she held her gaze
and glared with great ferocity.
And then she said, oh so sweetly,
"Just let go of my protégé
or I will curse you. Go away." [. . .]
Then Reason came to make her case
and did it with such strength and grace
That Silence understood indeed
what folly it would be to heed—
or think of taking—bad advice
and give up on his good old life
and take up feminine habits.

For now that he remembered it,
he'd heard about a woman's ways,
when shut up in her room all day.
When he compared that lot to his,
the choice was clear as day. That is,
a man has all a woman lacks:
his life is better, that's a fact.

Translated by Carol Symes, based on the edition of Lewis Thorpe, *Le Roman de Silence* (Cambridge: 1972), first published in Nottingham Medieval Studies 5–8 (1961–64) and 10–11 (1966–67), and revised by Sarah Roche-Mahdi, *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance* (East Lansing, MI: 1992–2007), vv. 2329–2656 (excerpts).

Questions for Analysis

1. How does this source reveal the ambiguity of Silence's gender identity? How does Reason intervene in the debate between Nature and Nurture?
2. Many medieval tales survive in single manuscript copies, so it is often hard to tell how popular they were. But based on your reading of this excerpt and what you have learned about medieval gender roles, do you think that the story of Silence would have found a wide audience? Why or why not?

Edward then turned to Scotland, England's final frontier. Until now, control of Scotland had not been an English concern. The Scottish border had been peaceful for many years, and the Scottish kings did homage to the English king for some of their lands. In 1290, however, the succession to the Scottish throne was disputed among many rival claimants, none of whom had enough backing to secure election. Edward intervened, pressing his own claim to the kingdom and seemingly prepared to take Scotland by conquest. To avoid this, the Scots forged an alliance with the French, but this did not prevent Edward's army from fighting its way through to Scone Abbey in 1296.

Scone was a symbolic target: the site of the Stone of Destiny on which Scottish kings were traditionally enthroned. So Edward seized this potent symbol, brought it back to Westminster Abbey in London, and embedded it in the coronation chair of his namesake, Edward the Confessor, the last Anglo-Saxon king of England. Save for a brief hiatus in 1950, when the stone was stolen from the abbey by Scottish nationalists—students at the University of Glasgow—it would remain there until 1996 as a sign that the sovereignty of Scotland had yielded to that of England. (It will be temporarily returned to London when the next British monarch is crowned.)

Edward considered the subjugation of Scotland to be England's manifest destiny (see ***Analyzing Primary Sources*** on pages 28–29). He called himself the "Hammer of the Scots," and when he died, he charged his son Edward II (r. 1307–1327) with the completion of his task. But the younger Edward, unlike his father, was not a ruthless and efficient advocate of English expansion. He also had to contend with a rebellion led by his own queen, Isabella of France, who also engineered his abdication and murder. Their son, Edward III (r. 1327–1377), eventually renewed his grandfather's expansionist policies, but his main target was France, not Scotland—thus launching Europe's two strongest monarchies into a war that would last for more than 100 years.

Analyzing Primary Sources

A Declaration of Scottish Independence

In April 1320, a group of powerful Scottish lords gathered at the abbey of Arbroath to draft a letter to Pope John XXII in Avignon. The resulting Declaration of Arbroath petitioned the exiled pope (a Frenchman loyal to the French king) to recognize the Scots as a sovereign nation and to support their right to an independent kingdom that would be free from encroachment by the English. The Scots' elected king, Robert the Bruce, had been excommunicated by a previous pope who had upheld English claims to lordship in Scotland. The letter therefore makes a number of different arguments for the recognition of the Scots' right to self-governance.

We know, most Holy Father and lord, and have gathered from the deeds and books about men in the past, that . . . the nation of the Scots has been outstanding for its many distinctions. It journeyed from the lands of Greece and Egypt by the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Pillars of Hercules, . . . but could not be subdued anywhere by any peoples however barbaric. . . . It took possession of the settlements in the west which it now desires, after first driving out the Britons and totally destroying the Picts, and although often attacked by the Norwegians, Danes and English. Many were its victories and innumerable its efforts. It has held these places always free of all servitude, as the old histories testify. One hundred and thirteen kings of their royal lineage have reigned in their kingdom, with no intrusion by a foreigner.

If the noble qualities and merits of these men were not obvious for other reasons, they shine forth clearly enough in that they were almost the first to be called to his most holy faith by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, our Lord Jesus Christ, after his Passion and Resurrection, even though they were settled on the most distant boundaries of the earth. . . .

Thus our people lived until now in freedom and peace . . . , until that mighty prince Edward [I] king of England (the father of the present king) in the guise of a friend and ally attacked our kingdom in hostile fashion, when it had no head and the people were not harbouring any evil treachery, nor were they accustomed to wars or attacks. His unjust acts, killings, acts of violence, pillagings, burnings, imprisonments of prelates, burnings of monasteries, robbings and killings of regular clergy, and also innumerable other outrages, which he committed against the said people, sparing none on account of age or sex, religion or order—no one could write about them or fully comprehend them who had not been instructed by experience.

From these countless ills we have been set free, with the help of Him who follows up wounds with healing and cures, by our most energetic prince, king and lord Sir Robert [the Bruce; r. 1306–1329]. . . . By divine providence his succession to his right according to our laws and customs which we intend to maintain to the death, together with the due consent and assent of us all, have made him our prince and king. . . . But if he should give up what he has begun, seeking to subject us or our kingdom to the king of the English, . . . we would immediately strive to expel him as our enemy and a subverter of his right and ours, and we would make someone else our king, who is capable of seeing to our defence. For as long as a hundred of us remain alive, we intend never to be subjected to the lordship of the English, in any way. For it is not for glory in war, riches or honours that we fight, but only for the laws of our fathers and for freedom, which no good man loses except along with his life.

Therefore, most Holy Father and lord, we implore your holiness with all vehemence in our prayers that you . . . look with paternal eyes on the troubles and difficulties brought upon us and the Church of God by the English. And that you deign to admonish and exhort the king of the English, who ought to be satisfied with what he has (since England was formerly enough for seven kings or more), to leave us Scots in peace, living as we do in the poor country of Scotland beyond which there is no dwelling place, and desiring nothing but our own. . . .

It is important for you, Holy Father, to do this, since you see the savagery of the heathen raging against Christians (as the sins of Christians require), and the frontiers of Christendom are being curtailed day by day, and you have seen how much it detracts from your holiness's reputation if (God forbid!) the Church suffers eclipse or scandal in any part of it during your time. Let it then rouse the Christian princes who are covering up their true motivation when they pretend that they cannot go to the assistance of the Holy Land on account of wars with their neighbours. The real reason that holds them back is that in warring with their smaller neighbours they anticipate greater advantage to themselves and weaker resistance. . . .

But if your Holiness too credulously trusts the tales of the English fully, or does not leave off favouring the English to our confusion, then we believe that the Most High will blame you for the slaughter of bodies. . . . Dated at our monastery at Arbroath in Scotland 6 April 1320 in the fifteenth year of our said king's reign.

Source: Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, vol. 7, ed. A. B. Scott and D. E. R. Watt (Aberdeen, Scotland: 1996).

Questions for Analysis

1. On what grounds does this letter justify the political independence of the Scots? What different arguments does it make? Which in your view is the most compelling?
2. Why does this letter mention crusading? What are the Scottish lords implying about the relationship between Europe's internal conflicts and the ongoing wars with

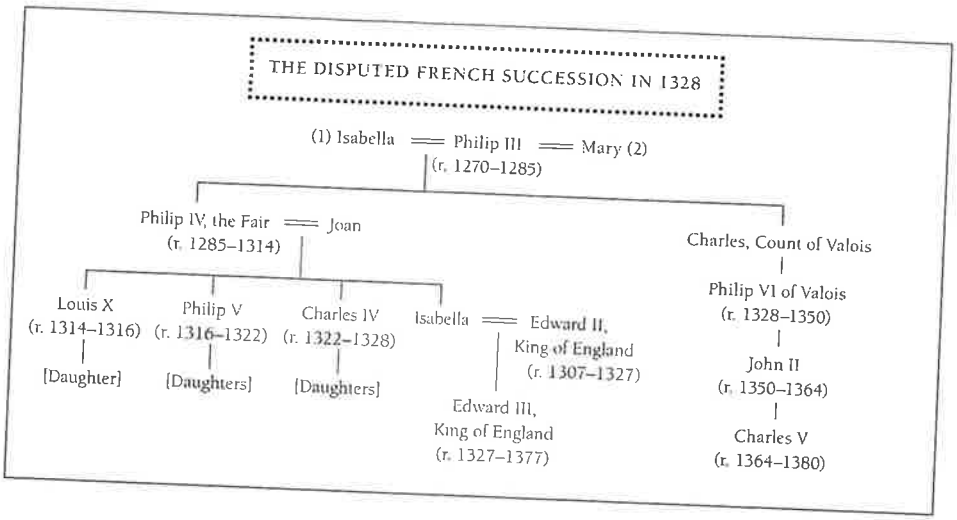
external adversaries?

3. Imagine that you are an adviser to the pope. Applying your knowledge of the papacy's situation at this time, would you advise him to do as this letter asks? Why or why not?

The Outbreak of the Hundred Years' War

The **Hundred Years' War** was the largest, longest, and widest-ranging military conflict since Rome's wars with Carthage in the third and second centuries B.C.E.. Although England and France were its principal antagonists, almost all major European powers became involved at some stage. Active hostilities began in 1337 and lasted until 1453, interrupted by truces of varying lengths. We will continue tracing its developments in Chapter 2.

The most fundamental source of conflict, and the most difficult to resolve, was the fact that the kings of England held the duchy of Gascony as vassals of the French king; this had been part of Eleanor of Aquitaine's domain, which was added to the Anglo-Norman Empire in 1154. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the French kings had not yet absorbed this region into their domain, this fact had seemed less of an anomaly. But as Europe's territorial monarchies began to claim sovereignty on the basis of the free exercise of power within the "natural" boundaries of their domains, the English presence in "French" Gascony became more and more problematic. The fact that England also had close commercial links, through the wool trade, with Flanders—which consistently resisted annexation by France—added fuel to the fire; as did the French alliance with the Scots, who continued to resist English annexation.



Complicating this volatile situation was the disputed succession of the French crown. In 1328, the last of Philip IV's three sons died without leaving a son to succeed him: the Capetian dynasty, founded by the Frankish warlord Hugh Capet in 987 had finally exhausted itself. A new dynasty, the Valois, came to the throne—but only by insisting that women could neither inherit royal power nor pass it on. For otherwise, the heir to France was Edward III of England, whose ambitious mother, Isabella, was Philip IV's only daughter. When his mother's claim was initially passed over, Edward was only fifteen and in no position to protest. In 1337, however, when the disputes over Gascony and Scotland erupted into war, Edward raised the stakes by claiming to be the rightful king of France, a claim that subsequent English kings would maintain until the eighteenth century.

Although France was richer and more populous than England by a ratio of at least three to one, the English crown was more effective in mobilizing the entire population. Edward III was therefore able to levy and maintain a professional army of seasoned and well-disciplined soldiers, cavalrymen, and archers. The huge but virtually leaderless armies assembled by the French proved no match for the tactical superiority of these smaller English forces. English armies pillaged the French countryside at will, while civil wars broke out between embattled French lords. A decade after the declaration of war, French knights were defeated in two humiliating battles at Crécy (1346) and Calais (1347).

The English seemed invincible—but they were no match for a new and unexpected adversary approaching from the Far East.

Check Your Understanding: 9 Of 12

INCOMPLETE

Question

Claims to sovereignty during this period were problematic because

Select an Answer

- **A.** not all territories were Christian, and only Christian realms can be sovereign.
- **B.** the sovereignty of one realm was won and maintained at the cost of other realms.
- **C.** not all territories were kingdoms, and only kingdoms can be sovereign.
- **D.** medieval realms were being pieced together through a process of conquest and colonization.

Report Issue

Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 10 Of 12

INCOMPLETE

Question

The Hundred Years' War between England and France was, in many ways, a test of the two monarchies' competing claims to sovereignty. What was one of the main issues that contributed to its outbreak?

Select an Answer

- **A.** French opposition to the English colonization of Wales
- **B.** French opposition to the independence of Flanders
- **C.** Edward III's claims to Gascony and to the French throne
- **D.** the fact that France was much more wealthy and populous than England

Report Issue

Check Answer

FROM THE GREAT FAMINE TO THE BLACK DEATH

By 1300, Europe was connected to Asia and the lands between by an intricate network that fostered connections of all kinds. At the same time, Europe was reaching its own ecological limits. Between 1000 and 1300, the population had tripled; a sea of grain fields stretched, almost unbroken, from Ireland to Ukraine; and forests had been cleared, marshes drained, and pastureland reduced by generations of peasants performing lifetimes of backbreaking labor. Yet Europe was barely able to feed its people. At the same time, the Medieval Warm Period was coming to an end, and with it the favorable climatic conditions that had enabled the agricultural revolution of the previous three centuries. Even a reduction of 1 or 2° C is enough to cause substantial changes in rainfall patterns, shorten growing seasons, and decrease agricultural productivity. So it did in Europe, with disastrous consequences.

Past and Present





Global Pandemics





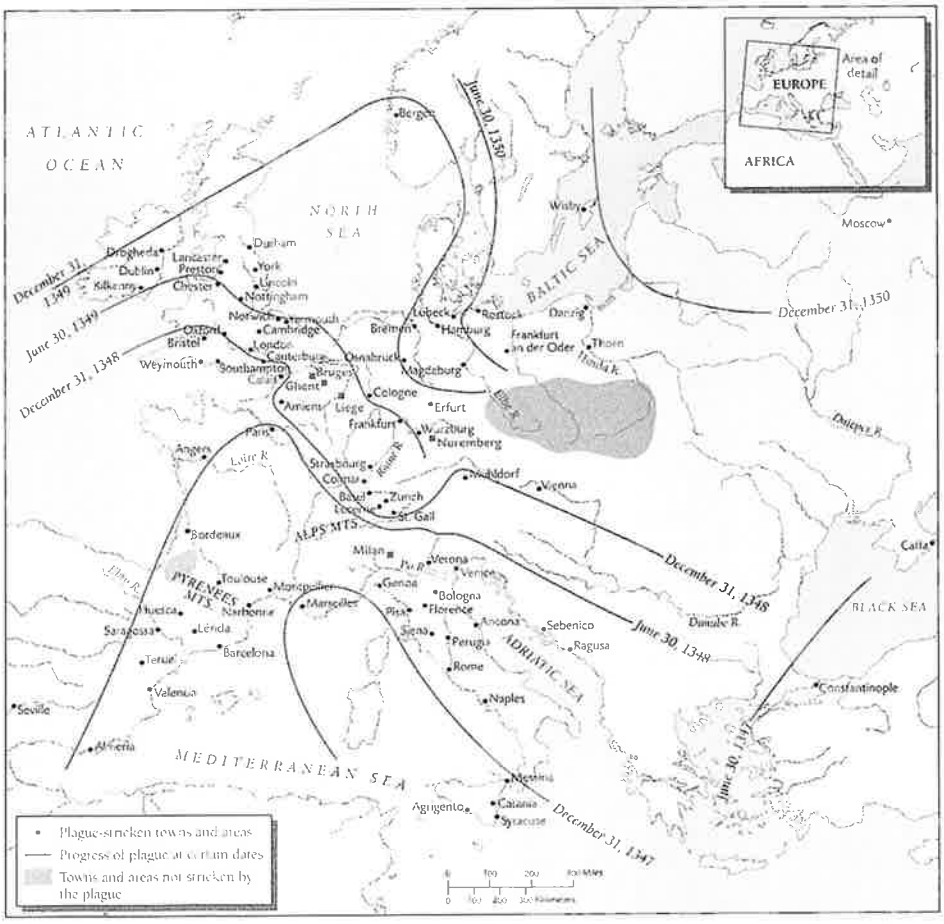
Although advances in medical science have made the causes of disease less mysterious, the rapid spread of new viruses is still terrifying and the variety of human responses to the possibility of sudden infection have changed little over time. The image on the left shows citizens from the town of Tournai (now in Belgium) marching in a procession to ward off the plague: they are praying and doing penance for their sins by beating their own bodies with whips, a practice called *flagellation*. The image on the right shows health care workers donning hazmat suits to protect themselves from the deadly Ebola virus outbreak of 2014–2015. By now, we are all familiar with images of masking and other public responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Video: From the Great Famine to the Black Death/Past and Present SHOW

Evil Times: The Seven Years' Famine

Between the years 1315 and 1322, the cooling global climate caused nearly continuous adverse weather conditions in the northern hemisphere. In Europe, winters were extraordinarily severe: in 1316, the Baltic Sea froze over and ships were trapped in the ice. For many years, unseasonal rains prevented planting in spring or summer, and when a crop did manage to struggle through, it would be dashed by rain and hail in autumn. Amid these natural calamities, dynastic warfare continued in the sodden farmlands of northern and eastern Europe, as the princes of Scandinavia and the Holy Roman Empire fought for supremacy and succession there. In the once-fertile fields of Flanders, French armies slogged through mud in continued efforts to subdue the Flemish population. On the Scottish and Welsh borders, uprisings were ruthlessly suppressed, and the paltry storehouses of the natives were pillaged to feed the English raiders.

The result was human suffering more devastating than that caused by any famine affecting Europe since that time; hence the name "**Great Famine**" to describe this terrible crisis. Weakened by years of malnutrition and relentless efforts to counteract the climatic effects on the landscape, between 10 and 15 percent of northern Europe's population perished. Many starved, while others fell victim to epidemic diseases that affected both animals and people. In southern Europe, around the shores of the Mediterranean, the effects of climate change were more muted, and food could be distributed through different channels. Nonetheless, the overall health of this region also suffered from the disruption of trade and the shortage of some staple goods, as well as from the highly unstable political situation we have discussed.



EUROPEAN OUTBREAKS OF THE BLACK DEATH, 1347–1350. ▪ ***What trajectories did the Black Death follow once it arrived in Europe?*** ▪ ***How might the growth of towns, trade, and travel have contributed to the spread of the Black Death?*** ▪ ***Would such a rapid advance have been likely during the early Middle Ages or even in the ancient world? Why or why not?***

As food grew scarcer, prices climbed unpredictably, making even staple goods unobtainable by the poor. Plans for future crops, which kept hope alive, would be dashed when spring arrived and flooded fields prevented seeds from germinating. People then spent cold summers and autumns foraging for food. Hunting was restricted to the nobility, but even those who risked the death penalty for poaching found little game. Wages did not keep pace with rising costs, and so those who lived in towns and depended on markets had less to spend on scarce provisions. Only a year after the famine began, townspeople were dying of ailments that would not have been fatal in good years.

The effects of the famine were especially devastating for children, since even those who survived were highly susceptible to disease, owing to the severe impairment of their immune systems. It may have been the Great Famine, then, that paved the way for the even more horrific destruction of the Black Death.

A Crisis of Connectivity: Tracking the Black Death

The Rapid Spread of the Black Death

The **Black Death** is the name given to a global plague pandemic that spread from central Asia to China, northern India, and western Asia with the Mongol conquests, after which it moved into Africa and Europe. Research by teams of historians and scientists over just the past few years has led to the realization that this outbreak of the plague was caused by the same *Yersinia pestis* microbe responsible for the Justinianic plague of the sixth century. Moreover, this research suggests that it may already have been active by the end of the twelfth century, and decimating Asian

communities in the early thirteenth. By 1346, it had reached the Black Sea, where it was transmitted to the Genoese colonists at Caffa and transported by their ships to North Africa, Sicily, and northern Italy. From there, it spread rapidly along global trade routes, advancing about two miles per day on average. By 1350, it had reached Scandinavia and northern Russia, then spread southward again until it linked up with the original waves of infection in its breeding grounds in central Asia, probably somewhere in the region of modern Kyrgyzstan. In Europe, it continued to erupt in local epidemics until the eighteenth century. In Asia and Africa, it was still causing devastating losses of life into the nineteenth century.

Although the absolute (total) mortality caused by other global pandemics has been greater—including the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919 and the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic—the *percentage* of the population affected by the Black Death was higher. In the space of a few decades, 40 to 60 percent of all people in these affected areas had died. The tremendous consequences of this catastrophe and the survivors' responses to the world left behind will be explored in Chapter 2. But what made this pandemic so deadly, even compared to its early medieval predecessor?

The *Yersinia pestis* genome was sequenced in 2013 using aDNA from the teeth of Black Death victims buried in London. Epidemiologists have since been able to show that it morphed rapidly into multiple strains after the Justinianic plague. Its bubonic form, which attacks the lymph nodes and produces painful pus-filled buboes in the groin, neck, and armpits, had probably developed in antiquity, and this was the form in which it spread during the sixth century. Thereafter, however, it morphed into even more virulent septicemic and pneumonic variants.

In its *bubonic* form, the plague microbe is carried by fleas that can live and travel in the fur or feathers of many different animals, including rats, marmots, hamsters, rabbits, camels, and birds. Humans contract it through flea bites or contact with an animal host. *Septicemic* plague occurs when an infected flea introduces the microbe directly into the human bloodstream, causing death within hours, usually before any symptoms of the disease are obvious. *Pneumonic* plague, perhaps the most frightening variation, results when particles of *Y. pestis* are inhaled and

infect the lungs, allowing the contagion to spread silently and invisibly, in the same ways as the common cold. Other forms of plague can be contracted by eating an infected animal, and many of its animal hosts were common dietary staples in medieval societies.

One of the things that made the Black Death so terrifying, therefore, was that it was mysteriously inconsistent. Those afflicted by the hideous bubonic plague might actually recover, whereas others—seemingly untouched—might die suddenly, from no apparent cause. Immediate reactions to the plague thus ranged from panic to anger to resignation. Observers quickly realized that the plague was contagious, but precisely how it spread remained unknown. Some believed that it was caused by breathing "bad air" and so urged people to flee from stricken areas, which caused the disease to spread even faster. Another response was the flagellant movement, so called because of the whips (*flagella*) with which traveling bands of penitents lashed themselves in order to appease the wrath of God. The unruly and sometimes hysterical mobs that gathered around the flagellants aroused the concern of both ecclesiastical and secular authorities, and the movement was suppressed by papal order.

Competing Viewpoints



The Black Death and the Jews: Christian Responses to Antisemitic Violence

*When the Black Death began to devastate Europe after 1347, it fueled a wave of violence against Jews. Jews were often accused of being the catalysts for the plague, for allegedly poisoning water supplies or through other **nefarious** means, or by taking undue advantage of the Christians who were dependent on them for financial reasons. In the small **Catalonian town of Tàrrega**, a massacre of Jews by their Christian neighbors is documented both in the royal inquest that condemned it and in a series of mass graves, dug by survivors, in which their slaughtered loved ones were carefully buried. In the German cities of the Rhineland, where Jews had also thrived for centuries under the protection of local rulers or municipal authorities, attempts were made to **pre-empt** such massacres by spreading the news of their occurrence in other parts of Europe, as we see in a letter from the town council of Cologne to their counterparts in nearby Strasbourg.*

The Slaughter Of The Jews Of Tàrrega By Their Christian Neighbors, July 1348

Listen as You Read

In the year just passed [i.e. 1348], some individuals of this town strongly **aroused** its people to put aside the fear of God and **our authority**, not hesitating to offend our majesty. Incited by a diabolical spirit, **with armed hand and deliberate intent**, they came maliciously to the ***call* of the Jewish community [*aljama*]** and with unwarranted recklessness they violently broke down and destroyed the gates of this *call* with axes and other types of weapons, and they even destroyed the *call* itself, entering into it all together and shouting loudly with raised voices, "Kill the traitors" [*Muyren los traydors*]. And not satisfied with that, but rivaling terrible acts with even worse things, they ruthlessly raided Jewish homes with spears, stones, and arrows. And, finally entering the said houses, they took away all the goods and property of the Jews, just as if they were thieves, and lawlessly they tore and burned **many legal instruments and various written contracts of the Jews** and they senselessly murdered many Jews in this community, and others were beaten mercilessly and were wounded, and they inflicted many terrible evils, grave injuries, offenses, robberies, harms, and atrocities and on these Jews.

Source: Anna Colet, et al. "The Black Death and Its Consequences for the Jewish Community in Tàrrega: Lessons from History and Archeology," *The Medieval Globe*. Latin text trans. Monica H. Green and Carol Symes (Yorkshire, UK: 2014): pp. 71–2.

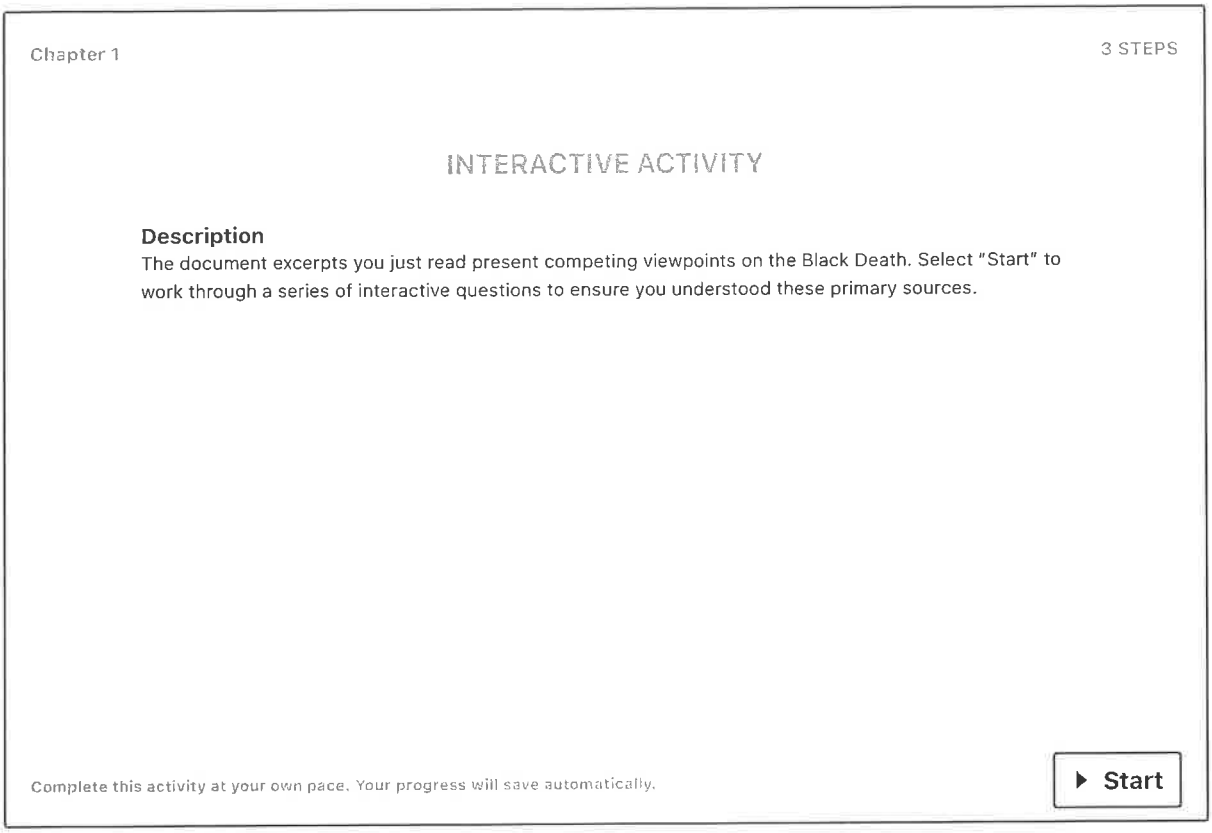
A Letter from the Town Council of Cologne to the Town Council of Strasbourg (Germany), 12 January 1349

Listen as You Read

Very dear friends, all sorts of rumours are now flying about against Judaism and the Jews prompted **by this unexpected and unparalleled mortality of Christians**. . . . Throughout our city, as in yours, many-winged Fame **clamours** that this mortality was initially caused, and is still being spread, by the poisoning of springs and wells, and that the Jews must have dropped poisonous substances into them. When it came to our knowledge that serious charges had been made against the Jews in several small towns and villages on the basis of this mortality, we sent numerous letters to you and to other cities and towns to uncover the truth behind these rumours, and set a thorough investigation in train. . . .

If a massacre of the Jews were to be allowed in the major cities (something which we are determined to prevent in our city, if we can, as long as the Jews are found to be innocent of these or similar actions) it could lead to the sort of outrages and disturbances which would whip up a popular revolt among the common people—and such revolts have in the past brought cities to misery and desolation. In any case we are still of the opinion that this mortality and its attendant circumstances are caused **by divine vengeance** and nothing else. Accordingly we intend to forbid any harassment of the Jews in our city because of these flying rumours, but to defend them faithfully and keep them safe, as our predecessors did—and we are convinced that you ought to do the same. . . .

Source: From Rosemary Horrox, ed. and trans., *The Black Death* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 219–20.



Questions for Analysis

1. How does the report of the massacre in Tàrrega describe the motives of the Christian murders? What are their apparent grievances against their Jewish neighbors?
2. Why does the Council of Cologne wish to quell violence against the city's Jews? How does this reasoning complement or challenge what we have learned so far about the treatment of Jews in medieval Europe?
3. In your view, do these two perspectives display a rational approach to the horrors of the Black Death? Why or why not? What are their wider implications for our understanding of antisemitic tropes and forms of violence?

Still others looked for scapegoats and revived old conspiracy theories that implicated Jews in the poisoning of communal water sources. Scores of Jewish communities were attacked and thousands of their inhabitants massacred in parts of the Rhineland, southern France, and the Christian kingdoms of Spain. For example, an important archaeological and forensic study published in 2014 reveals that hundreds of Jews—including children, the elderly, and the disabled—were brutally clubbed and hacked to death by their Christian neighbors in the small Catalonian town of

Tàrrega (see ***Competing Viewpoints*** on page 34). The papacy and some local authorities tried to halt such attacks, but these efforts usually came too late.

Check Your Understanding: 11 Of 12 INCOMPLETE

Question

The most significant change that contributed to the devastation of the Great Famine in Europe was

Select an Answer

- **A.** the constant disruptions caused by civil unrest and dynastic warfare.
- **B.** the arrival of the plague known as the Black Death.
- **C.** the growing interconnectivity of the medieval world.
- **D.** overpopulation and the cooling of the global climate.

Report Issue **Check Answer**

Check Your Understanding: 12 Of 12 INCOMPLETE

Question

Based on recent archaeological and scientific discoveries, we now have a better understanding of how the plague spread and why it was perceived as so terrifying and mysterious by those living at the time. For example, we now know that

Select an Answer

- **A.** it produced the highest total mortality of any pandemic in history.
- **B.** Yersinia pestis had morphed into a variety of forms and could produce different symptoms.
- **C.** Jewish communities were targeted as scapegoats.
- **D.** it was highly contagious.

Report Issue **Check Answer**

CONCLUSION

The century between 1250 and 1350 was a time of significant change within all Western civilizations. The growing power of some monarchies led to encroachments on territories and cities that had once been independent, fueling resistance to these internal acts of colonization. The papacy, whose power had seemed so secure at the turn of the thirteenth century, would itself become a pawn in the keeping of the French king by the beginning of the fourteenth. Rome thereby lost its last source of authority while the New Rome, Constantinople, struggled to rebuild its prestige in the face of Mongol expansion. Yet, for the Mongol khans and the merchants they favored, for seafaring cities such as Venice and Genoa, for ambitious students at the universities, and for men on the make, the opportunities for advancement and mobility were great.

Other factors were in play during this era. Even in good times, Europe's population had outgrown its capacity to produce food; and when the climate grew cooler, years of cold summers and heavy rainfall took an enormous toll. Those regions most closely tied to the new global networks were densely settled and urban, which made the shortage of food and the spread of disease more acute there. In short, the benefits and drawbacks of increased globalization were already beginning to manifest themselves in the early fourteenth century—700 years ago. The Black Death can be understood as the ultimate example of medieval connectivity.

The scale of mortality caused by this pandemic is almost unimaginable, to us as to those who survived it; in Europe alone, at least a third, and probably over half, of the population died between 1347 and 1353. In the countryside, thousands of villages disappeared. Cities and towns, overcrowded and unsanitary, were particularly vulnerable to plague and, thereafter, to outbreaks of violence. The immediate social consequences were profound, as were the

economic ones. Crops rotted in the fields, manufacturing ceased, and trade came to a standstill in affected areas. Basic commodities became scarcer and prices rose higher, prompting ineffectual efforts to control prices and to force the remaining able-bodied laborers to work.

These were the short-term effects. How did the Black Death matter to those who survived it—including us? According to Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), a Muslim historian who is considered one of the founders of modern historical methods, it marked the end of the old world and the beginning of a new one that would require new systems of government, bodies of knowledge, and forms of art. Was he right? We will begin to answer that question in Chapter 2.

After You Read This Chapter

Go to to see what you've learned—and learn what you've missed—with personalized feedback along the way.

REVIEWING THE OBJECTIVES

- How did the conquests of the Mongols significantly impact Europe?
- The expansion of commerce and communication between Eastern and Western civilizations created a new world system. What were some key characteristics of this system? What kinds of exchange did it enable?
- What is *sovereignty*? What were the effects of competition for sovereignty among European rulers?
- What were the short- and long-term causes for the papacy's loss of prestige? Why was the papal court moved to Avignon?
- What caused the Black Death? In what sense can it be seen as a product of the new world system that began with the Mongol conquests?

PEOPLE, IDEAS, AND EVENTS IN CONTEXT

- What accounts for the success of **GENGHIS KHAN** and his successors? What circumstances enabled **MARCO POLO**'s travels to China? To what extent does the term ***PAX MONGOLICA*** describe this era in history?
- How did seafaring communities such as **GENOA**, **VENICE**, and **CATALONIA** rise to prominence in this era? Why were

new navigational aids such as **PORTOLAN CHARTS** necessary?

- How do the paintings of **GIOTTO** capture contemporary attitudes toward the world? How does **DANTE**'s artistry respond to the religious and political trends of his day?
- What was at stake in the controversy between **BONIFACE VIII** and **PHILIP IV**? Why was the papacy's residency at **AVIGNON** called the **BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY**? What is a **SACRAMENT**? Why were these rites so important?
- In what different ways did **LOUIS IX** of France and **EDWARD I** of England contribute to the **SOVEREIGNTY** of their respective kingdoms? What was the relationship between claims to sovereignty and the causes of the **HUNDRED YEARS' WAR**?
- How did climate change contribute to the outbreak of the **GREAT FAMINE**?
- What were the long- and short-term causes of the **BLACK DEATH**?

THINKING ABOUT CONNECTIONS

- If the Mongol khan Ögedei had not died in 1241, the Mongols could conceivably have continued their westward movement into Europe. Knowing what you have learned about Mongol rule, how do you think this might have changed the history of the world?
- How do the patterns of conquest and colonization discussed in this chapter compare with those of earlier periods, particularly those of antiquity? How many of these developments were new in 1250–1350?
- We live in a world in which the global circulation of people, information, goods, and bacteria is rapid—hence the dangers of emerging viruses such as COVID-19. How does the medieval system compare with ours? What features seem familiar? What are the differences?