

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



Medieval Kingdoms in Europe, 800–1300

Lesson 2 Peasants, Trade, and Cities

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How can changes to political systems impact economic activities? How is society influenced by changes in political and economic systems?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

technology a manner of accomplishing a task using technical processes, methods, or knowledge

crucial essential; important

Content Vocabulary

carruca a heavy, wheeled plow with an iron plowshare

manor in medieval Europe, an agricultural estate that a lord ran and peasants worked

serf in medieval Europe, a peasant legally bound to the land who had to provide labor services, pay rents, and be subject to the lord’s control

bourgeoisie the middle class, including merchants, industrialists, and professional people

patrician a wealthy, powerful landowner

TAKING NOTES: *Describing*

ACTIVITY As you read, use a table like the one below to describe the factors that led to the growth of cities in Europe.

Factors Leading to the Growth of Cities

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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

New farming methods led to a large growth in the number of people in Europe during the High Middle Age. Many serfs worked the land under the manorial system. The revival of trade led to a money economy and the growth of cities.

The New Agriculture

Guiding Question *How did new farming methods benefit Europe in the Middle Ages?*

Europe had a fairly small population in the Early Middle Ages. During the High Middle Ages, however, the population almost doubled. Between 1000 and 1300, the population increased from 38 million to 74 million.

What caused this huge increase? For one thing, Europe was more settled and peaceful after the invasions of the Early Middle Ages had stopped. Food production also increased after 1000. This was because the climate changed during the High Middle Ages, and the result was better growing conditions for crops. Food production also grew because more land was used for agriculture. Trees were cut down and land cleared in order to make more land available for farming.

Changes in **technology** also helped to produce more food. Many labor-saving devices, or tools, were created during the Middle Ages. People began to use the power of the water and the wind to do jobs that humans or animals once did. Many of these new tools were made from iron, which was mined in different areas of Europe. Iron was **crucial** in making the **carruca**. The **carruca** was a heavy, wheeled plow with an iron plowshare, or cutting part. This plow was unlike earlier plows. It was drawn, or pulled, by six or eight oxen and easily turned over heavy clay soils to prepare ground for planting crops.

The use of the **carruca** also led to the growth of farming villages, where people worked together. Iron was expensive. An entire community had to get together to buy a **carruca** to share. Also, one family could not afford a team of animals. So villagers shared their animals.

Use of the **carruca** also led to the growth of farming villages, where people worked together. Because iron was expensive, an entire community had to buy a **carruca**. Likewise, one family could not afford a team of animals, so villagers shared their beasts.

Shifting from a two-field to a three-field crop rotation also increased food production. In the Early Middle Ages, peasants had divided their land into two fields. They planted one field and let the other lie fallow, or unplanted, each year. This helped the unplanted field regain its fertility. Each year they switched the field they planted. Then there was a change in this pattern. Lands were divided into three parts. Peasants planted one field in the fall with grains, such as rye or wheat. These grains were harvested, or picked, in summer. They planted the second field in spring with grains, such as oats and barley, and vegetables, such as peas and beans. They harvested these grains and vegetables in fall. They allowed the third field to lie fallow. This way, only one-third of the land lay fallow at any time instead of one-half. This practice of rotating crops on three fields kept the soil fertile and allowed people to grow more crops.

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Reading Progress Check

Making Connections What factors led to population growth in the High Middle Ages?

The Manorial System

Guiding Question *What was life like for nobles and peasants under the economic system of manorialism?*

Landholding nobles were a military elite. Their ability to be warriors depended on having the free time to practice war skills. Landed estates were located on the fiefs given to a vassal by his lord and farmed by peasants. The land supplied the economic support that made this way of life possible.

A **manor** was an agricultural estate that a lord managed and that peasants farmed. Free peasants continued to exist. However, increasing numbers of free peasants became **serfs**, or peasants legally bound to the land. Serfs had to give labor services to the lord, pay rents to the lord, and be under the lord's control. Probably 60 percent of western Europeans were serfs by 800.

Although free peasants continued to exist, increasing numbers of free peasants became serfs, or peasants legally bound to the land.

A serf's labor services included working the lord's land. The lord's land made up one-third to one-half of the cultivated, or planted, land on the estate, spread throughout the manor. Peasants used the rest of the estate's land to grow food for themselves. Serfs usually worked about three days a week for their lords. They paid rents by giving the lords part of every product they raised. Serfs also paid the lords for the use of the manor's common, or shared, pasturelands, streams, ponds, and woodlands.

Lords had many legal rights over the serfs on their estates. Serfs could not leave the manor without the lord's permission. Lords often had political authority on their lands. This gave them the right to try peasants in their own courts. However, serfs were not slaves. The land assigned to serfs to support themselves usually could not be taken away. Their responsibilities to the lord remained fairly fixed. It was also the lord's duty to protect his serfs. He had to ensure their safety so that they could farm the land.

The life of peasants in Europe was simple. They lived in small houses, or cottages. Their cottages had wood frames surrounded by sticks. The spaces between sticks were filled with straw and pieces of stone and then plastered over with clay. Roofs were simply thatched, or covered with straw. The houses of poorer peasants had a single room. Houses of richer peasants had at least two rooms. A main room was used for cooking, eating, and other activities. Another room was used for sleeping. There was little privacy in a medieval household.

The seasons of the year determined peasant activities. Each season brought a new set of tasks. Harvest time in August and September was especially busy. A good harvest of grains, used for making bread, was important to survival in the winter months. A new cycle of labor began in October, when peasants worked the ground to plant winter crops. Extra livestock were slaughtered, or killed, in November because there was usually not enough food to keep the animals alive all winter. The meat

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would be salted to preserve it for winter use. The land was plowed in February and March for planting spring crops. Crops included oats, barley, peas, and beans. Early summer was a fairly relaxed time, although there were still weeding and sheepshearing to be done.

In every season, the serfs worked both their own land and the lords' lands. Serfs had small gardens next to their homes in which they grew vegetables. The vegetables made up part of the peasants' diet. The basic part of the peasant diet, and of the medieval diet in general, was bread. Women made the dough for the bread and formed it into loaves. The loaves were usually baked in community ovens, which the lord owned. Peasant bread contained wheat, rye, barley, millet, and oats. It was highly nutritious. The ingredients in the bread give it a dark appearance and a heavy, hard texture.



Reading Progress Check

Summarizing How were serfs legally bound to the land?

The Revival of Trade

Guiding Question *How did the revival of trade result in a commercial revolution during the Middle Ages?*

Medieval Europe was an agricultural society. Most people lived in small villages. In the 1000s and 1100s, Europe experienced a revival of trade. This led to a growth of towns and cities.

The revival of trade in Europe was slow and took place over a long period of time. Italian cities, such as Venice, developed mercantile fleets, or a group of trading ships. The cities in Italy became major trading centers in the Mediterranean. Flanders is an area along the coast of present-day Belgium and northern France. Towns in Flanders were well located for northern European traders. Merchants from surrounding areas came to Flanders to buy woolen cloth. In the thirteenth century, a medieval trade association called the Hanseatic (HAN-see-a-tic) League developed in the Baltic and North Sea region. The Hanseatic League was an alliance of more than 100 northern European cities. These cities banded together for shared trade protection and to make more money.

A regular trade had developed between Flanders and Italy by the 1100s. The counts of Champagne, in northern France, started a series of annual, or yearly, trade fairs to encourage trade in their lands. Northern European merchants brought furs, woolen cloth, tin, hemp, and honey to trade for cloth and swords from northern Italy and the silks, sugar, and spices of the East. The demand for gold and silver coins increased as trade increased. A money economy slowly emerged. New trading companies and banking firms were set up to manage the exchange and sale of goods. Traders and these new economic institutions also set up new laws to deal with the changing of money, contracts, invoices, and bills of exchanges. These new practices were part of the rise of commercial capitalism. Commercial capitalism is an economic system in which people invested in trade and goods to make a profit.

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Reading Progress Check

Classifying Why were the towns of Flanders busy trading centers?

The Growth of Cities

Guiding Question *What spurred the growth of cities in the Middle Ages?*

The revival of trade led to a revival of cities. Towns had greatly declined in the Early Middle Ages, especially in Europe north of the Alps. Old Roman cities had continued to exist but they were smaller in size and population.

With the revival of trade, merchants began to settle there. They were followed by craftspeople or artisans. These were people who had developed skills in making goods, such as cloth and metalwork, and saw a chance to make goods that the merchants could sell. The old Roman cities came alive with new populations and growth in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Many new cities or towns were also founded, especially in northern Europe. Usually a group of merchants built a settlement near a castle. They typically did this because the castle was located along a trade route or river and because the lords of the castle would offer protection. If the settlement prospered, walls were built to protect it.

The merchants and artisans in these cities later came to be called burghers, from the German word *burg*, which means “an area with walls around it.” Another word from this was **bourgeoisie** (*burzh-wah-ZEE*). Medieval, or during the Middle Ages, cities were small in comparison with either ancient or modern cities. A large medieval trading city would have about 5,000 people.

Towns were often part of a lord’s territory and were under his authority. However, townspeople needed freedom to trade. They wanted their own laws and were willing to pay for them. Lords and kings saw that they could make money and sold to the townspeople the freedoms they wanted.

By 1100, townspeople had many rights from local lords. These included the right to buy and sell property and freedom from military service to the lord. The towns obtained a written law that guaranteed townspeople their freedom. An escaped serf had the right to become a free person after living for a year and a day in the town.

Over time, medieval cities developed their own governments for running the community. Only males who had been born in the city or who had lived there for some time were citizens. In many cities, citizens elected the city council members, who served as judges and city officials and passed laws. However, elections were rigged, or set up in a dishonest way, so that only **patricians** were elected. Patricians were members of the wealthiest and most powerful families.

Medieval cities were surrounded by stone walls. Walls were expensive to build. As a result, cities became crowded as more and more people moved into the existing space inside the walls. The cities had narrow, winding streets, and houses were crowded against one another. The second and third stories of houses were built out over the streets.

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The physical environment of medieval cities was not pleasant. Cities were often dirty and smelled from animal and human waste. Air pollution was also a fact of life. Smoke from wood fires or from burning cheap coal filled the air.

Many more men than women lived in medieval cities. Women were expected to supervise the household, prepare meals, raise the children, and manage the family's finances. They often helped their husbands in their crafts, and some made their own crafts to earn extra money. Sometimes, when a master craftsman died, his widow carried on his craft. It was possible for women in medieval towns to lead independent lives.

The revival of trade in Europe made cities and towns important centers for manufacturing a wide range of goods, such as cloth, metalwork, shoes, and other leather goods. Many crafts were made in houses located in the narrow streets. From the 1000s on, craftspeople began to organize themselves into guilds. Guilds were business associations, or groups in people who join together to protect their interests. The guilds played a leading role in the economic life of cities. By the 1200s, there were guilds for almost every craft, such as tanners and bakers. There were separate guilds for specialized groups of merchants, such as dealers in silk, spices, or wool. Craft guilds controlled many aspects of the crafts. Here are some examples:

- They directed almost every part of the production process for their craft. That is, they directed how the item should be made at each step.
- They set the standards for the quality of the articles produced.
- They even fixed the price at which the finished goods could be sold.
- They determined the number of people who could enter a specific craft.



Reading Progress Check

Making Generalizations What role did guilds play in the economic life of towns and cities?
