

Name:

Period # _____

AP European History: Summer Reading and Annotation Assignment

These annotations are **DUE THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS**. We will have a graded discussion on it that day.

Dear AP Euro students:

For your summer assignment, I've chosen two chapters from a book William Manchester's *A World Lit Only by Fire* that should give us a great head start on some CONTENT and also some SKILLS that we'll work on throughout the year. **I will grade your ANNOTATIONS based on the scoring guide below.**

This means you must read the two chapters and SHOW YOUR THINKING with annotations in the margins. That little voice inside your head as you're reading? That's what you should write in the margins. Also remember that you will refer back to this in MAY, so you want to be able to read your annotations and know what the article is about. This means you should paraphrase many of the big ideas in the margins. You would also want to box and define important terms. I'll also be looking for questions you have (that need clarification and also to spark discussion) connections you make to other subjects, history, or even random TV shows. Any connections are legitimate. Here are a few terms that you should pay particular attention to as you annotate, though it is obviously not even close to the only thing you would annotate:

TERMS TO KNOW (most of these are defined in the text. Some may require a little googling so you understand context):

- **Chapter 1: "The Medieval Mind":** Charlemagne, Clovis, St Augustine, Great Schism, Magellan
- **Chapter 2: "The Shattering":** Savonarola, Lorenzo de Medici, Chaucer, Magellan, Fuggers, Latern Councils, witchcraft

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- **What is wrong with the Medieval World that needs change?**
- **What role did the Catholic Church play in Europe during these eras?**

Reader showed thinking through annotations (how **much** did you write? Can I tell what you were thinking as you read?)

1 2 3 4 5

Reader showed a variety of ways to think:

- asked questions (for clarification and that would be good to discuss), _____
- paraphrased (summarize main ideas in margins) _____
- made connections (to other subjects, TV shows, whatever) _____
- shared opinions, (deeper than "wow") _____
- recognized confusion, _____
- shared new thinking, _____
- indicated important ideas/terms by making them "pop" visually (like box the terms). _____
- efforts to create a "coding system" _____

1 2 3 4 5

Total points _____

Manchester, William
A World Lit Only by Fire:
The Medieval Mind and the
Renaissance

Portrait of an Age (1992)

P. 3 - 28

"The Medieval Mind"

THE DENSEST of the medieval centuries — the six hundred years between, roughly, A.D. 400 and A.D. 1000 — are still widely known as the Dark Ages. Modern historians have abandoned that phrase, one of them writes, "because of the unacceptable value judgment it implies." Yet there are no survivors to be offended. Nor is the term necessarily pejorative. Very little is clear about that dim era. Intellectual life had vanished from Europe. Even Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman emperor and the greatest of all medieval rulers, was illiterate. Indeed, throughout the Middle Ages, which lasted some seven centuries after Charlemagne, literacy was scorned; when a cardinal corrected the Latin of the emperor Sigismund, Charlemagne's forty-seventh successor, Sigismund rudely replied, "*Ego sum rex Romanus et super grammatica*" — as "king of Rome," he was "above grammar." Nevertheless, if value judgments are made, it is undeniable that most of what is known about the period is unlovely. After the extant fragments have been fitted together, the portrait which emerges is a mélange of incessant warfare, corruption, lawlessness, obsession with strange myths, and an almost impenetrable mindlessness.

Europe had been troubled since the Roman Empire perished in the fifth century. There were many reasons for Rome's fall, among them apathy and bureaucratic absolutism, but the chain of events leading to its actual end had begun the century before. The defenders of the empire were responsible for a ten-thousand-mile frontier. Ever since the time of the soldier-historian Tacitus, in the first century A.D., the vital sector in the north — where the realm's border rested on the Danube and the Rhine — had been vulnerable. Above these great rivers the forests swarmed with barbaric Germanic tribes, some of them tamer than others but all

envious of the empire's prosperity. For centuries they had been intimidated by the imperial legions confronting them on the far banks.

Now they no longer were. They had panicked, stampeded by an even more fearsome enemy in their rear: feral packs of mounted Hsiung-nu, or Huns. Ignorant of agriculture but expert archers, bred to kill and trained from infancy to be pitiless, these dreaded warriors from the plains of Mongolia had turned war into an industry. "Their country," it was said of them, "is the back of a horse." It was Europe's misfortune that early in the fourth century the Huns had met their masters at China's Great Wall. Defeated by the Chinese, they had turned westward, entered Russia about A.D. 355, and crossed the Volga seventeen years later. In 375 they fell upon the Ostrogoths (East Goths) in the Ukraine. After killing the Ostrogoth chieftain, Ermanaric, they pursued his tribesmen across eastern Europe. An army of Visigoths (West Goths) met the advancing Huns on the Dniester, near what is now Romania. The Goths were cut to pieces. The survivors among them — some eighty thousand — fled toward the Danube and crossed it, thereby invading the empire. On instructions from the Emperor Valens, imperial commanders charged with defense of the frontier first disarmed the Gothic refugees, next admitted them subject to various conditions, then tried to enslave them, and finally, in A.D. 378, fought them, not with Roman legions, but using mercenaries recruited from other tribes. Caesar would have wept at the spectacle that followed. In battle the mercenaries were overconfident and slack; according to Ammianus Marcellinus, Tacitus's Greek successor, the result was "the most disastrous defeat encountered by the Romans since Cannae" — six centuries earlier.

Under the weight of relentless attacks by the combined barbaric tribes and the Huns, now Gothic allies, the Danube-Rhine line broke along its entire length and then collapsed. Plunging deeper and deeper into the empire, the invaders prepared to penetrate Italy. In 400 the Visigoth Alaric, a relatively enlightened chieftain and a zealous *religieux*, led forty thousand Goths, Huns, and freed Roman slaves across the Julian Alps. Eight years of fighting followed. Rome's cavalry was no match for the tribal horsemen; two-thirds of the imperial legions were slain. In 410 Alaric's

triumphant warriors swept down to Rome itself, and on August 24 they entered it.

Thus, for the first time in eight centuries, the Eternal City fell to an enemy army. After three days of pillage it was battered almost beyond recognition. Alaric tried to spare Rome's citizens, but he could not control the Huns or the former slaves. They slaughtered wealthy men, raped women, destroyed priceless pieces of sculpture, and melted down works of art for their precious metals. That was only the beginning; sixty-six years later another Germanic chieftain deposed the last Roman emperor in the west, Romulus Augustulus, and proclaimed himself ruler of the empire. Meantime Gunderic's Vandals, Clovis's Franks, and most of all the Huns under their terrible new chieftain Attila — who had seized power by murdering his brother — ravaged Gaul as far south as Paris, paused, and lunged into Spain. In the years that followed, Goths, Alans, Burgundians, Thuringians, Frisians, Gepidae, Suevi, Alemanni, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Lombards, Heruli, Quadi, and Magyars joined them in ravaging what was left of civilization. The ethnic tide then settled in its conquered lands and darkness descended upon the devastated, unstable continent. It would not lift until forty medieval generations had suffered, wrought their pathetic destinies, and passed on.

THE DARK AGES were stark in every dimension. Famines and plague, culminating in the Black Death and its recurring pandemics, repeatedly thinned the population. Rickets afflicted the survivors. Extraordinary climatic changes brought storms and floods which turned into major disasters because the empire's drainage system, like most of the imperial infrastructure, was no longer functioning. It says much about the Middle Ages that in the year 1500, after a thousand years of neglect, the roads built by the Romans were still the best on the continent. Most others were in such a state of disrepair that they were unusable; so were all European harbors until the eighth century, when commerce again began to stir. Among the lost arts was bricklaying; in all of Germany, England, Holland, and Scandinavia, virtually no stone buildings, except cathedrals, were raised for ten centuries. The serfs' basic agricultural tools were picks, forks, spades, rakes, scythes, and balanced

sickles. Because there was very little iron, there were no wheeled plowshares with moldboards. The lack of plows was not a major problem in the south, where farmers could pulverize light Mediterranean soils, but the heavier earth in northern Europe had to be sliced, moved, and turned by hand. Although horses and oxen were available, they were of limited use. The horse collar, harness, and stirrup did not exist until about A.D. 900. Therefore tandem hitching was impossible. Peasants labored harder, sweated more, and collapsed from exhaustion more often than their animals.

Surrounding them was the vast, menacing, and at places impassable, Hercynian Forest, infested by boars; by bears; by the hulking medieval wolves who lurk so fearsomely in fairy tales handed down from that time; by imaginary demons; and by very real outlaws, who flourished because they were seldom pursued. Although homicides were twice as frequent as deaths by accident, English coroners' records show that only one of every hundred murderers was ever brought to justice. Moreover, abduction for ransom was an acceptable means of livelihood for skilled but landless knights. One consequence of medieval peril was that people huddled closely together in communal homes. They married fellow villagers and were so insular that local dialects were often incomprehensible to men living only a few miles away.

The level of everyday violence — deaths in alehouse brawls, during bouts with staves, or even in playing football or wrestling — was shocking. Tournaments were very different from the romantic descriptions in Malory, Scott, and Conan Doyle. They were vicious sham battles by large bands of armed knights, ostensibly gatherings for enjoyment and exercise but really occasions for abduction and mayhem. As late as the year 1240, in a tourney near Düsseldorf, sixty knights were hacked to death.

Despite their bloodthirstiness — a taste which may have been acquired from the Huns, Goths, Franks, and Saxons — all were devout Christians. It was a paradox: the Church had replaced imperial Rome as the fixer of European frontiers, but missionaries found teaching pagans the lessons of Jesus to be an almost hopeless task. Yet converting them was easy. As quickly as the barbaric tribes had overrun the empire, Catholicism's overrunning of the tribesmen was even quicker. As early as A.D. 493 the Frankish

chieftain Clovis accepted the divinity of Christ and was baptized, though a modern priest would have found his manner of championing the Church difficult to understand or even forgive. Fortunately Clovis was accompanied by a contemporary, Bishop Gregory of Tours. The bishop made allowances for the violent streak in the Frankish character. In his writings Gregory portrayed his protégé as a heroic general whose triumphs were attributable to divine guidance. He proudly set down an account of how the chief dealt with a Frankish warrior who, during a division of tribal booty at Soissons, had wantonly swung his ax and smashed a vase. As it happened, the broken pottery had been Church property and much cherished by the bishop. Clovis knew that. Later, picking his moment, he split the warrior's skull with his own ax, yelling, "Thus you treated the vase at Soissons!"

Medieval Christians, knowing the other cheek would be bloodied, did not turn it. Death was the prescribed penalty for hundreds of offenses, particularly those against property. The threat of capital punishment was even used in religious conversions, and medieval threats were never idle. Charlemagne was a just and enlightened ruler — for the times. His loyalty to the Church was absolute, though he sometimes chose peculiar ways to demonstrate it. Conquering Saxon rebels, he gave them a choice between baptism and immediate execution; when they demurred, he had forty-five hundred of them beheaded in one morning.

That was not remarkable. Soldiers of Christ swung their swords freely. And the victims were not always pagans. Every flourishing religion has been intermittently watered by the blood of its own faithful, but none has seen more spectacular internecine butchery than Christianity. In A.D. 330 Constantine I, the first Roman emperor to recognize Jesus as his savior, made Constantinople the empire's second capital. Within a few years, a great many people who shared his faith began to die there for their interpretation of it. The emperor's first Council of Nicaea failed to resolve a doctrinal dispute between Arius of Alexandria and the dominant faction of theologians. Arius rejected the Nicene Creed, taking the unitarian position that although Christ was the son of God, he was not divine. Attempts at compromise foundered; Arius died, condemned as a heresiarch; his Arians rioted and were put to the

sword. Over three thousand Christians thus died at the hands of fellow Christians — more than all the victims in three centuries of Roman persecutions. On April 13, 1204, nearly nine centuries later, medieval horror returned to Constantinople when the armies of the Fourth Crusade, embittered by their failure to reach the Holy Land, turned on the city, sacked it, destroyed sacred relics, and massacred the inhabitants.



CHRIST'S missionary commandment had been clearly set forth in Matthew (28:19-20), but in the early centuries after his crucifixion the flame of faith flickered low. Wholesale conversions of Germans, Celts, and Slavs did not begin until about A.D. 500, after Christianity had been firmly established as the state religion of the Roman Empire. Its victories were deceptive; few of its converts understood their new faith. Paganism — Stoicism, Neoplatonism, Cynicism, Mithraism, and local cults — continued to be deeply entrenched, not only in the barbaric tribes, but also among the Sophists, teachers of wisdom in the old imperial cities: Athens, Alexandria, Smyrna, Antioch, and Rome itself, which was the city of Caesar as well as Saint Peter. Constantine had tried to discourage pagan ceremonies and sacrifices, but he had not outlawed them, and they continued to flourish.

This infuriated the followers of Jesus. They were split on countless issues — Arianism, which was one of them, flourished for over half a century — but united in their determination to raze the temples of the pagans, confiscate their property, and subject them to the same official persecutions Christians had endured in the catacombs, including the feeding of martyrs to lions. This vindictiveness seems an incongruity, inconsistent with the Gospels. But medieval Christianity had more in common with paganism than its worshippers would acknowledge. The apostles Paul and John had been profoundly influenced by Neoplatonism. Of the seven cardinal virtues named by Pope Gregory I in the sixth century, only three were Christian — faith, hope, and charity — while the other four — wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance — were adopted from the pagans Plato and Pythagoras. Pagan philosophers argued that the Gospels contradicted each other, which they do, and pointed out that Genesis assumes a

plurality of gods. The devout scorned reason, however. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), the most influential Christian of his time, bore a deep distrust of the intellect and declared that the pursuit of knowledge, unless sanctified by a holy mission, was a pagan act and therefore vile.

Ironically, the masterwork of Christianity's most powerful medieval philosopher was inspired by a false report. Alaric's sack of Rome, it was said, had been the act of a barbaric pagan seeking vengeance for his idols. (This was inaccurate; actually, Alaric and a majority of his Visigoths were Arian Christians.) Even so, the followers of Jesus were widely blamed for bringing about Rome's fall; men charged that the ancient gods, offended by the empire's formal adoption of the new faith, had withdrawn their protection from the Eternal City. One Catholic prelate, the bishop of Hippo — Aurelius Augustinus, later Saint Augustine — felt challenged. He devoted thirteen years to writing his response, *De civitate Dei* (*The City of God*), the first great work to shape and define the medieval mind. Augustine (354-430) began by declaring that Rome was being punished, not for her new faith, but for her old, continuing sins: lascivious acts by the populace and corruption among politicians. The pagan deities, he wrote, had lewdly urged Romans to yield to sexual passion — "the god Virgineus to loose the virgin's girdle, Subigus to put her beneath a man's loins, Prema to hold her down . . . Priapus upon whose huge and beastly member the new bride was commanded by religious order to stir and receive!"

Here Augustine, by his own account, spoke from personal experience. In his *Confessions* he had described how, before his conversion, he had devoted his youth to exploring the outer limits of carnal depravity. But, he wrote, the original sin, and he now declared that there was such a thing, had been committed by Adam when he yielded to Eve's temptations. As children of Adam, he held, all mankind shared Adam's guilt. Lust polluted every child in the very act of conception — sexual intercourse was a "mass of perdition [*exitium*]." However, although most people were thereby damned in the womb, some could be saved by the blessed intervention of the Virgin Mary, who possessed that power because she had conceived Christ sinlessly: "Through a woman we

were sent to destruction; through a woman salvation was restored to us." He thus drew a sharp line. The chief distinction between the old faiths and the new were in the sexual arena. Pagans had accepted prostitution as a relief from monogamy. Worshipers of Jesus vehemently rejected it, demanding instead purity, chastity, and absolute fidelity in husbands and wives. Women found this ringing affirmation enormously appealing. Aurelius Augustinus — whose influence on Christianity would be greater than that of any other man except the apostle Paul — was the first to teach medieval men that sex was evil, and that salvation was possible only through the intercession of the Madonna.

But there were subtler registers to Augustine's mind. In his most complex metaphor, he divided all creation into *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena*. Everyone had to embrace one of them, and a man's choice would determine where he spent eternity. In chapter fifteen he explained: "Mankind [*hominum*] is divided into two sorts: such as live according to man, and such as live according to God. These we mystically call the 'two cities' or societies, the one predestined to reign eternally with God, the other condemned to perpetual torment with Satan." Individuals, he wrote, would slip back and forth between the two cities; their fate would be decided at the Last Judgment. Because he had identified the Church with his *civitas Dei*, Augustine clearly implied the need for a theocracy, a state in which secular power, symbolizing *civitas terrena*, would be subordinate to spiritual powers derived from God. The Church, drawing the inference, thereafter used Augustine's reasoning as an ideological tool and, ultimately, as a weapon in grappling with kings and emperors.



THE HOLY SEE'S struggle with Europe's increasingly powerful crowned heads became one of the most protracted in history. When Augustine finished his great work in 426, Celestine I was pope. In 1076 — over a hundred pontiffs later — the issue was still unresolved. Holy Fathers in the Vatican, near Nero's old Circus, were still fighting Holy Roman emperors, trying to end the prerogative of lay rulers to invest prelates with authority. An exasperated Gregory VII, resorting to his ultimate sanction, excommunicated Emperor Henry IV. That literally brought Henry

to his knees. He begged for absolution and was granted it only after he had spent three days and nights prostrate in the snows of Canossa, outside the papal castle in northern Italy. Canossa became a symbol of secular submission, but improperly so; the emperor's contrition was short-lived. Changing his mind, he renewed his attack, and, undeterred by a second excommunication, drove Gregory from Rome. Bitterly the pontiff wrote, "*Dilexi iustitiam et odi iniquitatem; propterea morior in exilio*" — because he had "loved justice and hated iniquity" he would "die in exile." Another century passed before the papacy wrested independence from the imperial courts in Germany. Even then conflicts remained, and they were not fully resolved until early in the thirteenth century, when Innocent III brought the Church to the height of its prestige and power.

Nevertheless the entire medieval millennium took on the aspect of triumphant Christendom. As aristocracies arose from the barbaric mire, kings and princes owed their legitimacy to divine authority, and squires became knights by praying all night at Christian altars. Sovereigns courting popularity led crusades to the Holy Land. To eat meat during Lent became a capital offense, sacrilege meant imprisonment, the Church became the wealthiest landowner on the Continent, and the life of every European, from baptism through matrimony to burial, was governed by popes, cardinals, prelates, monsignors, archbishops, bishops, and village priests. The clergy, it was believed, would also cast decisive votes in determining where each soul would spend the afterlife.

And yet . . .

The crafty but benevolent pagan gods — whose caprice and intransigence existed only in the imagination of Christian theologians eager to discredit them — survived all this. Imperial Rome having yielded to barbarians, and then barbarism to Christianity, Christianity was in turn infiltrated, and to a considerable extent subverted, by the paganism it was supposed to destroy. Medieval men simply could not bear to part with Thor, Hermes, Zeus, Juno, Cronus, Saturn, and their peers. Idol worship addressed needs the Church could not meet. Its rituals, myths, legends, marvels, and miracles were peculiarly suited to people who, living in the trackless fen and impenetrable forest, were always vulnerable

to random disaster. Moreover, its creeds had never held, as the Augustinians did, that procreation was evil; pagans celebrating Aphrodite, Eros, Hymen, Cupid, and Venus could rejoice in lust. Thus the allegiance of converts was divided. Few saw any inconsistency or double-dealing in it. Hedging bets seemed only sensible. After all, it was just possible that Rome *had* fallen because the pagan deities had turned away from the city whose emperors no longer recognized them. What harm could come from paying token tribute to their ancient dignity? If people went to Mass and followed the commandments, there would be no retaliation from new worshippers of the savior, with their commitments to humility, mercy, tenderness, and kindness. The old genies, on the other hand, had never forgiven anyone anything, and as the Greeks had noted, the dice of the gods were always loaded.

So Christian churches were built on the foundations of pagan temples, and the names of biblical saints were given to groves which had been considered sacred centuries before the birth of Jesus. Pagan holidays still enjoyed wide popularity, therefore the Church expropriated them. Pentecost supplanted the Floralia. All Souls' Day replaced a festival for the dead, the feast of the purification of Isis and the Roman Lupercalia were transformed into the Feast of the Nativity. The Saturnalia, when even slaves had enjoyed great liberty, became Christmas; the resurrection of Attis, Easter. There was a lot of legerdemain in this. No one then knew the year Christ was born — it was probably 5 B.C. — let alone the date. Sometime in A.D. 336 Roman Christians first observed his birthday. The Eastern Roman Empire picked January 6 as the day, but later in the same century December 25 was adopted, apparently at random. The date of his resurrection was also unrecorded. The early Christians, believing that their lord's return was imminent, celebrated Easter every Sunday. After three hundred years their descendants became reconciled to a delay. In an attempt to link Easter with the Passion, it was scheduled on Passover, the Jewish feast observing the Exodus from Egypt in the thirteenth century B.C. Finally, in A.D. 325, after long and bitter controversy, the First Council of Nicaea settled on the first Sunday after the full moon following the spring equinox. The

decision had no historical validity, but neither did the event, and it comforted those who cherished traditional holidays.

As mass baptisms swelled its congregations, the Church further indulged the converts by condoning ancient rites, or attempting to transform them, in the hope — never realized — that they would die out. Fertility rituals and augury were sanctioned; so was the sacrifice of cattle. After the pagan sacrifice of humans was replaced by Christianity's symbolic Mass, the ceremonial performance of the sacraments became of paramount importance. Christian priests, like the pagan priests before them, also blessed harvests and homes. They even asked omnipotent God to spare communities from fire, plague, and enemy invasions. This was tempting fate, however, and medieval fate never resisted temptation for long. In time the flames, diseases, and invaders came anyway, invariably followed by outbreaks of anticlericalism, or even backsliding into such extravagant sects as the flagellants, who appeared recurrently in the wake of the Black Death. Nevertheless the traffic in holy relics, to which supernatural powers were attributed, never slackened, and Christian miracle stories continued to attribute pagan qualities to saints.

Neither Jesus nor his disciples had mentioned sainthood. The designation of saints emerged during the second and third centuries after Christ, with the Roman persecution of Christians. The survivors of the catacombs believed those who had been martyred had been received directly into heaven and, being there, could intercede for the living. They revered them as saints, but they never venerated idols of them. All the early Christians had despised idolatry, reserving special scorn for sculptures representing pagan gods. Typically, Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150?-220?), a theologian and teacher, declared that it was sacrilege to adulate that which is created, rather than the creator. However, as the number of saints grew, so did the medieval yearning to give them identity; worshippers wanted pictures of them, images of the Madonna, and replicas of Christ on the cross. Statues of Horus, the Egyptian sky god, and Isis, the goddess of royalty, were rechristened Jesus and Mary. Craftsmen turned out other images and pictures to meet the demands of Christians who kissed them, prostrated themselves

before them, and adorned them with flowers. Incense was introduced in Christian church services around 500, followed by the burning of candles. Each medieval community, in times of crisis, evoked the supposed potency of its patron saint, or of the relics it possessed.

Augustine deplored the adoration of saints, but priests and parishioners alike believed that the devil could be driven away by invoking their powers, or by making the sign of the cross. Medieval astrologers and magicians flourished. Clearly all this met a deep human need, but thoughtful men were troubled. Reaction came in the eighth century. Leo III, the deeply pious Byzantine emperor, believed it his imperial duty to defend true Christianity against all who would desecrate it. To him the adoption of pagan ways was sacrilege, and he was particularly offended by the veneration of relics and religious pictures during the celebration of Mass. After citing Deuteronomy 4:16 — which forbids worship of any “graven image” or “the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female” — he issued a draconian edict in 726. On his orders, soldiers were to remove all icons and representations of Jesus and Mary from churches. All murals, frescoes, and mosaics were to be plastered over.

This made Leo history's most celebrated iconoclast. It also enraged his subjects. In the Cyclades Islands they rebelled. In Venice and Ravenna they drove out imperial authorities. In Greece they elected an antiemperor and sent a fleet to capture Leo. He sank the fleet, but when his troops tried to enforce the edict, they were attacked at church doors by outraged mobs. Undeterred, in 730 the emperor proclaimed iconoclasm the official policy of the empire. But then the Church intervened. The lower clergy had opposed image breaking from its outset. They were joined by prelates, then by the patriarch of Constantinople, and, finally, by a council of bishops called by Pope Gregory II. Enforcing Leo's edict proved impossible anyway. At his death in 741 most of the art he had ordered destroyed or covered up was untouched, and forty-six years later, when the Second Council of Nicaea met, the Church formally abandoned his policy. After all, Rome was also the old imperial stronghold of a romantic polytheism whose local deities, now renamed for saints, were cloaked in myth and legend.

Since the fourth century, Christian art there had reflected that heritage. The form, construction, and columnar basilican style of the original St. Peter's basilica, built between 330 and 360, were all in the pagan tradition. And nearby Santa Maria Maggiore, begun by Pope Sixtus III in 432, was actually the site of a former pagan temple.

■ WAS THE MEDIEVAL WORLD a civilization, comparable to Rome before it or to the modern era which followed? If by civilization one means a society which has reached a relatively high level of cultural and technological development, the answer is no. During the Roman millennium imperial authorities had controlled the destinies of all the lands within the empire — from the Atlantic in the west to the Caspian Sea in the east, from the Antonine Wall in northern Britain to the upper Nile valley in the south. Enlightened Romans had served as teachers, lawgivers, builders, and administrators; Romans had reached towering pinnacles of artistic and intellectual achievement; their city had become the physical and spiritual capital of the Roman Catholic Church.

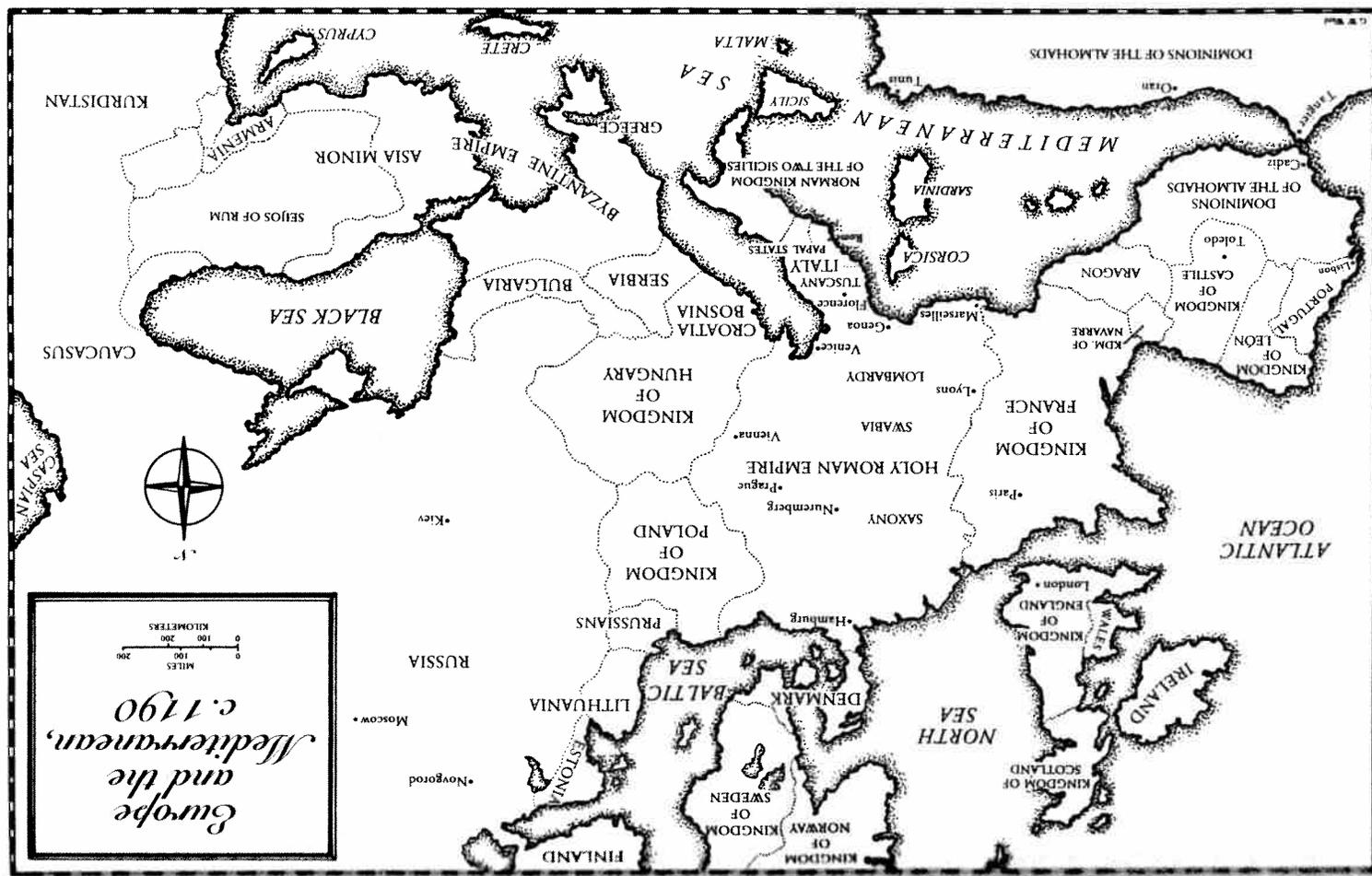
The age which succeeded it accomplished none of these. Trade on the Mediterranean, once a Roman lake, was perilous; Vandal pirates, and then Muslim pirates, lay athwart the vital sea routes. Agriculture and transport were inefficient; the population was never fed adequately. A barter economy yielded to coinage only because the dominant lords, enriched by plunder and conquest, needed some form of currency to pay for wars, ransoms, their departure on crusades, the knighting of their sons, and their daughters' marriages. Royal treasury officials were so deficient in elementary skills that they were dependent upon arithmetic learned from the Arabs; the name *exchequer* emerged because they used a checkered cloth as a kind of abacus in doing sums. If their society was diverse and colorful, it was also anarchic, formless, and appallingly unjust.

Nevertheless it possessed its own structure and peculiar institutions, which evolved almost imperceptibly over the centuries. Medievalism was born in the decaying ruins of a senile and impotent empire; it died just as Europe was emerging as a distinctive cultural unit. The interregnum was the worst of times for the

imaginative, the cerebral, and the unfortunate, but the strong, the healthy, the shrewd, the handsome, the beautiful — and the lucky — flourished.

Europe was ruled by a new aristocracy: the noble, and, ultimately, the regal. After the barbarian tribes had overwhelmed the Roman Empire, men had established themselves as members of the new privileged classes in various ways. Any leader with a large following of free men was eligible, though some had greater followings, and therefore greater claims, than others. In Italy some were members of Roman senatorial families, survivors who had intermarried with Goths or Huns; as Ovid had observed, a barbarian was suitable if he was rich. Others in the patriciate were landowners whose huge domains (*latifundia*) were worked by slaves and protected by private armies of *bucellarii*. In England and France the privileged might be descendants of Angle, Saxon, Frank, Vandal, or Ostrogoth chieftains. Many German hierarchs belonged to very old families, revered since time immemorial, and therefore acceptable to the other princes — the *Reichsfürstentum* — who had to approve each ennoblement. Because this was a time of incessant warfare, however, most noblemen had risen by distinguishing themselves in battle. In the early centuries distinction ended with the death of the man who had won it, but patrilineal descent became increasingly common, creating dynasties.

Titles evolved: duke, from the Latin *dux*, meaning a military commander; earl, from the Anglo-Saxon *eorla* or *cheorl* (as distinguished from *churl*); count or comte, from the Latin *comes*, a companion of a great personage; baron, from the Teutonic *beron*, a warrior; margrave, from the Dutch *markgraaf*; and marquess, marquis, *markis*, *marques*, *marqués*, or *marchese*, from the Latin *marca* — literally a frontier, or frontier territory. Serving these, on the lowest rung of the aristocratic ladder, was the knight (French *chevalier*, German *Ritter*, Italian *cavaliere*, Spanish *caballero*, Portuguese *cavaleiro*). Originally the word meant a farm worker of free birth. By the eleventh century knights were cavalymen living in fortified manstons, each with his noble seal. All were guided, in theory at least, by an idealistic knightly code and bound by oath to serve a



duke, earl, count, baron, or marquis who, in turn, periodically honored him with gifts: horses, falcons, even weapons.

ROYALTY WAS invested with glory, swathed in mystique, and clothed with magical powers. To be a king was to be a lord of men, a host at great feasts for his vassal dukes, earls, counts, barons, and marquises; a giver of rings, of gold, of landed estates. Because the first medieval rulers had been barbarians, most of what followed derived from their customs. Chieftains like Ermanaric, Alaric, Attila, and Clovis rose as successful battlefield leaders whose fighting skills promised still more triumphs to come. Each had been chosen by his warriors, who, after raising him on their shields, had carried him to a pagan temple or a sacred stone and acclaimed him there. In the first century Tacitus had noted that the chiefs' favored lieutenants were the *gasindi* or *comitatus* — future nobles — whose supreme virtue was absolute loyalty to the chief. Lesser tribesmen were grateful to him for the spoils of victory, though his claim on their allegiance also had supernatural roots.

His retinue always included pagan priests — sometimes he himself was one — and he was believed to be either favored by the gods or descended from them. When Christian missionaries converted a chieftain, his men obediently followed him to the baptismal font. Christian priests then enthroned his successors. A bishop's investiture of a Frankish chief was recorded in the fifth century, and by 754, when Pope Stephen II consecrated the new king of the Franks — Pepin the Short, Charlemagne's father — impressive ceremonies and symbols had been designed. The liturgy drew Old Testament precedents from Solomon and Saul; Pepin was crowned and solemnly armed with a royal scepter. The Holy Father exacted promises from him that he would defend the Church, the poor, the weak, and the defenseless; he then proclaimed him anointed of the Lord.

Hereditary monarchy, like hereditary nobility, was largely a medieval innovation. It is true that some barbarian lieutenants had held office by descent rather than deed. But the chieftains had been chosen for merit, and early kings wore crowns only *ad vitam aut culpam* — for life or until removed for fault. Because the papacy

opposed primogeniture, secular leaders tried to maintain the fiction that sovereigns were elected — during the Capetian dynasty court etiquette required that all references to the king of France mention that he had been chosen by his subjects, when in fact son succeeded father in unbroken descent for 329 years — but by the end of the Middle Ages, this pretense had been abandoned. In England, France, and Spain the succession rights of royal princes had become absolute. After 1356 only Holy Roman emperors were elected (by seven carefully designated electors), and then only because the Vatican was in a position to insist on it, the office being within the Christian community, or *ecclesia*. Even so, beginning in 1437 the Habsburg family had a stranglehold on the imperial title.

The conspicuous sacerdotal role in the crowning of kings, who then claimed that they ruled by divine right, was characteristic of Christianity's domination of medieval Europe. Proclamations from the Holy See — called bulls because of the *bullae*, a leaden seal which made them official — were recognized in royal courts. So were canon (ecclesiastical) law and the rulings of the Curia, the Church's central bureaucracy in Rome. Strong sovereigns continued to seek freedom from the Vatican, with varying success; in the twelfth century, the quarrels between England's Henry II and the archbishop of Canterbury ended with the archbishop's murder, and the Holy Roman emperor Frederick Barbarossa ("Redbeard"), battling to establish German predominance in western Europe, was in open conflict with a series of popes.

However, the greatest wound to the prestige of the Vatican was self-inflicted. In 1305 Pope Clement V, alarmed by Italian disorders and a campaign to outlaw the Catholic Knights Templars, moved the papacy to Avignon, in what is now southeastern France. There it remained for seven pontificates, despite appeals from such figures as Petrarch and Saint Catherine of Siena. By 1377, when Pope Gregory XI returned the Holy See to Rome, the College of Cardinals was dominated by Frenchmen. After Gregory's death the following year the sacred college was hopelessly split. A majority wanted a French pontiff; a minority, backed by the Roman mob, demanded an Italian. Intimidated, the college capitulated to the rabble and elected Bartolomeo Prignano of Naples. French dissidents fled home and chose one of their own, with

the consequence that for nearly forty years Christendom was ruled by two Vicars of Christ, a pope in Rome and an antipope in Avignon.

IN ANOTHER AGE, so shocking a split would have created a crisis among the faithful, but there was no room in the medieval mind for doubt; the possibility of skepticism simply did not exist. *Katholikos*, Greek for "universal," had been used by theologians since the second century to distinguish Christianity from other religions. In A.D. 340 Saint Cyril of Jerusalem had reasoned that what all men believe must be true, and ever since then the purity of the faith had derived from its wholeness, from the conviction, as expressed by an early Jesuit, that all who worshiped were united in "one sacramental system under the government of the Roman Pontiff." Anyone not a member of the Church was to be cast out of this life, and more important, out of the next. It was consent to the worst fate imaginable, like being exiled from an ancient German tribe — "to be given forth," in the pagan Teutonic phrase, "to be a wolf in holy places." The faithless were doomed; the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) reaffirmed Saint Cyprian's third-century dictum: "*Nulla salus extra ecclesiam*" — "Outside the Church there is no salvation." Any other finding would have been inconceivable.

Catholicism had thus found its greatest strength in total resistance to change. Saint Jean Baptiste de la Salle, in his *Les devoirs d'un Chrétien* (*Duties of a Christian*, 1703), defined Catholicism as "the society of the faithful collected into one and the same body, governed by its legitimate pastors, of whom Jesus Christ is the invisible head — the pope, the successor of Saint Peter, being his representative on earth." Saint Vincent of Lérins had written in his *Commonitoria* (*Memoranda*, c. 430) that the Church had become "a faithful and ever watchful guardian of the dogmas which have been committed to her charge. In this secret deposit she changes nothing, she takes nothing from it, she adds nothing to it."

Subsequent spokesmen for the Holy See enlarged upon this, assuming, in God's name, the right to prohibit changes by those who worshiped elsewhere or nowhere. Overstating this absolutism is impossible. "The Catholic Church holds it better,"

wrote a Roman theologian, "that the entire population of the world should die of starvation in extremest agony . . . than that one soul, I will not say should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin." In the words of one pope, "The Church is independent of any earthly power, not merely in regard to her lawful end and purpose, but also in regard to whatever means she may deem suitable and necessary to attain them." Another pope, agreeing, declared that God had made the Vatican "a sharer in the divine magistracy, and granted her, by special privilege, immunity from error." Even to "appeal from the living voice of the Church" was "a treason," wrote a cardinal, "because that living voice is supreme; and to appeal from that supreme voice is also a heresy, because that voice, by divine assistance, is infallible." A fellow cardinal put it even more clearly: "The Church is not susceptible of being reformed in her doctrines. The Church is the work of an Incarnate God. Like all God's works, it is perfect. It is, therefore, incapable of reform."



THE MOST BAFELING, elusive, yet in many ways the most significant dimensions of the medieval mind were invisible and silent. One was the medieval man's total lack of ego. Even those with creative powers had no sense of self. Each of the great soaring medieval cathedrals, our most treasured legacy from that age, required three or four centuries to complete. Canterbury was twenty-three generations in the making; Chartres, a former Druidic center, eighteen generations. Yet we know nothing of the architects or builders. They were glorifying God. To them their identity in this life was irrelevant. Noblemen had surnames, but fewer than one percent of the souls in Christendom were wellborn. Typically, the rest — nearly 60 million Europeans — were known as Hans, Jacques, Sal, Carlos, Will, or Will's wife, Will's son, or Will's daughter. If that was inadequate or confusing, a nickname would do. Because most peasants lived and died without leaving their birthplace, there was seldom need for any tag beyond One-Eye, or Roussie (Redhead), or Bionda (Blondie), or the like.

Their villages were frequently innumerate for the same reason. If war took a man even a short distance from a nameless hamlet, the chances of his returning to it were slight; he could not identify

it, and finding his way back alone was virtually impossible. Each hamlet was inbred, isolated, unaware of the world beyond the most familiar local landmark: a creek, or mill, or tall tree scarred by lightning. There were no newspapers or magazines to inform the common people of great events; occasional pamphlets might reach them, but they were usually theological and, like the Bible, were always published in Latin, a language they no longer understood. Between 1378 and 1417, Popes Clement VII and Benedict XIII reigned in Avignon, excommunicating Rome's Urban VI, Boniface IX, Innocent VII, and Gregory XII, who excommunicated them right back. Yet the toiling peasantry was unaware of the estrangement in the Church. Who would have told them? The village priest knew nothing himself; his archbishop had every reason to keep it quiet. The folk (*Leute*, *popolo*, *pueblo*, *gens*, *gente*) were baptized, shriven, attended mass, received the host at communion, married, and received the last rites never dreaming that they should be informed about great events, let alone have any voice in them. Their anonymity approached the absolute. So did their mute acceptance of it.

In later ages, when identities became necessary, their descendants would either adopt the surname of the local lord — a custom later followed by American slaves after their emancipation — or take the name of an honest occupation (Miller, Taylor, Smith). Even then they were casual in spelling it; in the 1580s the founder of Germany's great munitions dynasty variously spelled his name as Krupp, Krupe, Kripp, Kripe, and Krapp. Among the implications of this lack of selfhood was an almost total indifference to privacy. In summertime peasants went about naked.

In the medieval mind there was also no awareness of time, which is even more difficult to grasp. Inhabitants of the twentieth century are instinctively aware of past, present, and future. At any given moment most can quickly identify where they are on this temporal scale — the year, usually the date or day of the week, and frequently, by glancing at their wrists, the time of day. Medieval men were rarely aware of which century they were living in. There was no reason they should have been. There are great differences between everyday life in 1791 and 1991, but there were very few between 791 and 991. Life then revolved around the

passing of the seasons and such cyclical events as religious holidays, harvest time, and local fetes. In all Christendom there was no such thing as a watch, a clock, or, apart from a copy of the Easter tables in the nearest church or monastery, anything resembling a calendar. * Generations succeeded one another in a meaningless, timeless blur. In the whole of Europe, which was the world as they knew it, very little happened. Popes, emperors, and kings died and were succeeded by new popes, emperors, and kings; wars were fought, spoils divided; communities suffered, then recovered from, natural disasters. But the impact on the masses was negligible. This lockstep continued for a period of time roughly corresponding in length to the time between the Norman conquest of England, in 1066, and the end of the twentieth century. Inertia reinforced the immobility. Any innovation was inconceivable; to suggest the possibility of one would have invited suspicion, and because the accused were guilty until they had proved themselves innocent by surviving impossible ordeals — by fire, water, or combat — to be suspect was to be doomed.

EVEN DURING the Great Schism, as the interstice of the rival popes came to be known, the Holy See remained formidable. In 1215 the medieval papacy had reached its culmination at the Fourth Lateran Council, held in a Roman palace which, before Nero confiscated it, had been the home of the ancient Laterani family. The council, representing the entire Church, was brilliantly attended. Its decrees were of supreme importance, covering confession, Easter rites, clerical and lay reform, and the doctrine of transubstantiation, an affirmation that at holy communion bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. The council glorified Vicars of Christ in language of unprecedented majesty and splendor; pontiffs were explicitly permitted to exert authority not only in theological matters, but also in all vital political issues which might arise. Later in the thirteenth century Saint Thomas Aquinas celebrated the accord of reason and

*Because of the complex method used to determine when Easter would fall each year, Easter tables reckoned the future dates of the celebration. Easter in turn determines the dates of all other movable feasts in the Christian calendar.

revelation, and in 1302 *Unam Sanctam* — a bull affirming papal supremacy — was proclaimed. Even during its Avignon exile the Church progressed, centralizing its government and creating an elaborate administrative structure. Medieval institutions seemed stronger than ever.

And yet, and yet . . .

Rising gusts of wind, disregarded at the time, signaled the coming storm. The first gales affected the laity. Knighthood, a pivotal medieval institution, was dying. At a time when its ceremonies had finally reached their fullest development, chivalry was obsolescent and would soon be obsolete. The knightly way of life was no longer practical. Chain mail had been replaced by plate, which, though more effective, was also much heavier; horses which were capable of carrying that much weight were hard to come by, and their expense, added to that of the costly new mail, was almost prohibitive. Worse still, the mounted knight no longer dominated the battlefield; he could be outmaneuvered and unhorsed by English bowmen, Genoese crossbowmen, and pikemen led by lightly armed men-at-arms, or sergeants. Europe's new armies were composed of highly trained, well-armed professional infantrymen who could remain in the field, ready for battle, through an entire season of campaigning. Since only great nation-states could afford them, the future would belong to powerful absolute monarchs.

By A.D. 1500 most of these sovereign dynasties were in place, represented by England's Henry VII, France's Louis XII, Russia's Ivan III, Scandinavia's John I, Hungary's Ladislas II, Poland's John Albert, and Portugal's Manuel I. Another major player was on the way: in 1492, when the fall of Granada destroyed the last vestiges of Moorish power on the Iberian peninsula, Spaniards completed the long reconquest of their territory. The union of their two chief crowns with the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile laid the foundations for modern Spain; together they began suppressing their fractious vassals. Germany and Italy, however, were going to be late in joining the new Europe. On both sides of the Alps prolonged disputes over succession delayed the coalescence of central authority. As a result, in the immediate future Italians would continue to live in city-states

or papal states and Germans would still be ruled by petty princes. But this fragmentation could not last. A kind of centripetal force, strengthened by emerging feelings of national identity among the masses, was reshaping Europe. And that was a threat to monolithic Christendom.

The papacy was vexed otherwise as the fifteenth century drew to a close. European cities were witnessing the emergence of educated classes inflamed by anticlericalism. Their feelings were understandable, if, in papal eyes, unpardonable. The Lateran reforms of 1215 had been inadequate; reliable reports of misconduct by priests, nuns, and prelates, much of it squalid, were rising. And the harmony achieved by theologians over the last century had been shattered. Bernard of Clairvaux, the anti-intellectual saint, would have found his worst suspicions confirmed by the new philosophy of nominalism. Denying the existence of universals, nominalists declared that the gulf between reason and revelation was unbridgeable — that to believe in virgin birth and the resurrection was completely unreasonable. Men of faith who might have challenged them, such as Thomas à Kempis, seemed lost in a dream of mysticism.

At the same time, a subtle but powerful new spirit was rising in Europe. It was virulently subversive of all medieval society, especially the Church, though no one recognized it as such, partly because its greatest figures were devout Catholics. During the pontificate of Innocent III (1198–1216) the rediscovery of Aristotelian learning — in dialectic, logic, natural science, and metaphysics — had been readily synthesized with traditional Church doctrine. Now, as the full cultural heritage of Greece and Rome began to reappear, the problems of synthesis were escalating, and they defied solution. In Italy the movement was known as the Rinascimento. The French combined the verb *renaître*, “revive,” with the feminine noun *naissance*, “birth,” to form Renaissance — rebirth.



FIXING A DATE for the beginning of the Renaissance is impossible, but most scholars believe its stirrings had begun by the early 1400s. Although Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Saint Francis of Assisi, and the painter Giotto de Bondone — all of whom seem to have been

infused with the new spirit — were dead by then, they are seen as forerunners of the reawakening. In the long reach of history, the most influential Renaissance men were the writers, scholars, philosophers, educators, statesmen, and independent theologians. However, their impact upon events, tremendous as it was, would not be felt until later. The artists began to arrive first, led by the greatest galaxy of painters, sculptors, and architects ever known. They were spectacular, they were most memorably Italian, notably Florentine, and because their works were so dazzling — and so pious — they had the enthusiastic blessing and sponsorship of the papacy. Among their immortal figures were Botticelli, Fra Filippo Lippi, Piero della Francesca, the Bellinis, Giorgione, Della Robbia, Titian, Michelangelo, Raphael, and, elsewhere in Europe, Rubens, the Brueghels, Dürer, and Holbein. The supreme figure was Leonardo da Vinci, but Leonardo was more than an artist, and will appear later in this volume, trailing clouds of glory.

When we look back across five centuries, the implications of the Renaissance appear to be obvious. It seems astonishing that no one saw where it was leading, anticipating what lay round the next bend in the road and then over the horizon. But they lacked our perspective; they could not hold a mirror up to the future. Like all people at all times, they were confronted each day by the present, which always arrives in a promiscuous rush, with the significant, the trivial, the profound, and the fatuous all tangled together. The popes, emperors, cardinals, kings, prelates, and nobles of the time sorted through the snarl and, being typical men in power, chose to believe what they wanted to believe, accepting whatever justified their policies and convictions and ignoring the rest. Even the wisest of them were at a hopeless disadvantage, for their only guide in sorting it all out — the only guide anyone ever has — was the past, and precedents are worse than useless when facing something entirely new. They suffered another handicap. As medieval men, crippled by ten centuries of immobility, they viewed the world through distorted prisms peculiar to their age.

In all that time nothing of real consequence had either improved or declined. Except for the introduction of waterwheels in the 800s and windmills in the late 1100s, there had been no inventions of significance. No startling new ideas had appeared, no new terri-

ories outside Europe had been explored. Everything was as it had been for as long as the oldest European could remember. The center of the Ptolemaic universe was the known world — Europe, with the Holy Land and North Africa on its fringes. The sun moved round it every day. Heaven was above the immovable earth, somewhere in the overarching sky; hell seethed far beneath their feet. Kings ruled at the pleasure of the Almighty; all others did what they were told to do. Jesus, the son of God, had been crucified and resurrected, and his reappearance was imminent, or at any rate inevitable. Every human being adored him (the Jews and the Muslims being invisible). During the 1,436 years since the death of Saint Peter the Apostle, 211 popes had succeeded him, all chosen by God and all infallible. The Church was indivisible, the afterlife a certainty; all knowledge was already known. *And nothing would ever change.*

The mighty storm was swiftly approaching, but Europeans were not only unaware of it; they were convinced that such a phenomenon could not exist. Shackled in ignorance, disciplined by fear, and sheathed in superstition, they trudged into the sixteenth century in the clumsy, hunched, pigeon-toed gait of rickets victims; their vacant faces, pocked by smallpox, turned blindly toward the future they thought they knew — gullible, pitiful innocents who were about to be swept up in the most powerful, incomprehensible, irresistible vortex since Alaric had led his Visigoths and Huns across the Alps, fallen on Rome, and extinguished the lamps of learning a thousand years before.

WHEN THE CARTOGRAPHERS of the Middle Ages came to the end of the world as they knew it, they wrote: *Beware: Dragons Lurk Beyond Here*. They were right, though the menacing dimension was not on maps, but on the calendar. It was time, not space. There the fiercest threats to their medieval mind-set waited in ambush. A few of the perils had already infiltrated society, though their presence was unsuspected and the havoc they would wreak was yet to come. Some of the dragons were benign, even saintly; others were wicked. All, however, would seem monstrous to those who cherished the status quo, and their names included Johannes Gutenberg, Cesare Borgia, Johann Tetzel, Desiderius

Erasmus, Martin Luther, Jakob Fugger, François Rabelais, Girolamo Savonarola, Nicolaus Copernicus, Giordano Bruno, Niccolò Machiavelli, William Tyndale, John Calvin, Vasco Núñez de Balboa, Emperor Charles V, King Henry VIII, Tomás de Torquemada, Lucrezia Borgia, William Caxton, Gerardus Mercator, Girolamo Aleandro, Ulrich von Hutten, Martin Waldseemüller, Thomas More, Catherine of Aragon, Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and — most fearsome of all, the man who would destroy the very world the cartographers had drawn — Ferdinand Magellan.

Manchester, William

A World Lit Only by Fire:

The Medieval Mind and The Renaissance

Portrait of an Age (1992)

From ch.

"The Shattering"

P. 37-67

THE SHATTERING

37

AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT the most dangerous enemy in Europe was the reigning pope. It seems odd to think of Holy Fathers in that light, but the five Vicars of Christ who ruled the Holy See during Magellan's lifetime were the least Christian of men: the least devout, least scrupulous, least compassionate, and among the least chaste — lechers, almost without exception. Ruthless in their pursuit of political power and personal gain, they were medieval despots who used their holy office for blackmail and extortion. Under Innocent VIII (r. 1484-1492) simony was institutionalized; a board was set up for the marketing of favors, absolution, forged papal bulls — even the office of Vatican librarian, previously reserved for the eminent — with 150 ducats (about \$3,750)* from each transaction going to the pontiff. Selling pardons for murderers raised some eyebrows, but a powerful cardinal explained that "the Lord desireth not the death of a sinner but rather that he live and pay." The fact is that everything in the Holy See was up for auction, including the papacy itself. Innocent's successor, the Spanish cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, became Alexander VI (r. 1492-1503), the second Borgia pope — Callixtus III had been the first — by buying off the other leading candidates. He sent his closest rival, Ascanio Cardinal Sforza, four mules laden with ingots of gold.

The Vatican's permissive attitude toward men convicted of homicide was not entirely illogical. The papal palace itself was often home to killers and their accomplices. Popes and cardinals hired assassins, sanctioned torture, and frequently enjoyed the sight of blood. In his official history, *Storia d'Italia* (1561-1564), Francesco Guicciardini noted the remarkable spectacle of "the High Priest, the Vicar of Christ on earth" — in this instance Julius II — "excited" by a scene in which Christians slaughtered one

*This is a rough conversion. Providing modern equivalents of original currencies is extremely difficult. The sort of basic consumption items for which we have figures — e.g., grain, oil, wine — have tended to grow absolutely less expensive with the productivity of modern agriculture. Moreover, there were at least twenty distinct ducats afloat in the sixteenth century, each with a different value, and a similar number of florins, guilders, livres, pounds, et cetera. The florin and the ducat with the largest circulation had the same value. For the purpose of this narrative, that value may be considered analogous to twenty-five dollars today.

Questions to Consider

- What's wrong that requires change?
- What's different about the Medieval?

Where do you see mention of SIN (Simony, Indulgences, Nepotism)?

* People to Know

- Savonarola
- Lorenzo de' Medici
- Chaucer
- Magellan
- Fuggers

* Ideas to Know

• Later Councils

witchcraft

another, "retaining nothing of the pontiff but the name and the robes." The Alsatian Johann Burchard was papal *magister ceremoniarum*, or master of ceremonies, from 1483 to 1506. Burchard was one of those rare men historians bless: a diarist. In his *Diarium*, a day-by-day chronicle of pontifical life, he tells how, at one Vatican banquet, another Holy Father "watched with loud laughter and much pleasure" from a balcony while his bastard son slew unarmed criminals, one by one, as they were driven into a small courtyard below.

That was recreational homicide. The strangling of Alfonso Cardinal Petrucci with a red silk noose — the executioner was a Moor; Vatican etiquette enjoined Christians from killing a prince of the Church — was a graver matter. In 1517 Petrucci, who considered himself ill used by Pope Leo X, had led a conspiracy of several cardinals to dispatch the Holy Father by injecting poison into his buttock on the pretext of lancing a boil. A servant betrayed them. Petrucci's accomplices were pardoned after paying huge fines. The highest, 150,000 ducats, was exacted from Raffaele Cardinal Riario, a great-nephew of a previous pope.

Such grisly tales of pontifical mayhem are found in contemporary diaries, but the details of massacres among the lower Roman classes are lost to us, though we know they occurred; diplomats stationed there attest to that. An envoy from Lombardy wrote of "murders innumerable. . . . One hears nothing but moaning and weeping. In all the memory of man the Church has never been in such an evil plight." That plight grew wicked; a few years later the Venetian ambassador reported that "every night four or five murdered men are discovered, bishops, prelates, and others." If such slaughters were remarkable, so was the alacrity with which the Eternal City forgot them. When the blood on killers' knives had clotted and dried, when the graves had been filled in and cadavers removed from the Tiber, the mood tended to be hedonistic. "God has given us the papacy," Leo X wrote his brother. "Let us enjoy it." The prelates of that age had large appetites for pleasure. Pietro Cardinal Riario held "a saturnalian banquet," according to one account, "featuring a whole roasted bear holding a staff in its jaws, stags reconstructed in their skins,

herons and peacocks in their feathers, and" — there would be more of this later — "orgiastic behavior by the guests appropriate to the ancient Roman model."

In previous centuries, when the cause of Christianity had met with some striking success, their predecessors had opened St. Peter's for Te Deums of thanksgiving. Now prayer had become unfashionable. Alexander VI caught the spirit of the new age in the first year of his reign. Told that Castilian Catholics had defeated the Moors of Granada, this Spanish pontiff scheduled a bullfight in the Piazza of St. Peter's and cheered as five bulls were slain. The menu for Riario's feast and the Borgia pope's celebration reveal a Church hopelessly at odds with the preachings of Jesus, whose existence was the sole reason for *its* existence. But sitting in the Piazza of St. Peter's was more comfortable than kneeling at the altar within, and other diversions were more entertaining than holy communion. Among them were compulsive spending on entertainment, gambling (and cheating) at cards, writing dreadful poems and reciting them in public, hiring orchestras to play while the prelates wallowed in gluttony, applauding elaborate theatrical performances. During the digestive process, the churchmen emptied great flagons of strong wine, whereupon intoxication inspired their eminences and even His Holiness to improvise bawdy exhibitions with female guests selected from the city's brothels — which kept the papal master of ceremonies scribbling in his diary — until dawn brightened the papal palace and hangers-on gave its inhabitants some idea of how merciless God's vengeance could be.

It was Alexander, the Borgia pope, who first suppressed books critical of the papacy. He was either unaware of Burchard's diary or indifferent to it, though there is another possibility: he may have been incapable of appreciating it. Men accept the values of their time and reject criticisms of them as irrelevant. Moreover, iniquitous regimes do not perpetuate themselves in disciplined societies, nor does a strong, pure, holy institution, supported by centuries of selflessness and integrity, abruptly find itself wallowing in corruption. Vice, no less than virtue, arises from precedents. Over the thirteen centuries since Christianity's rise to power the

Church had lost its way because the wrong criteria had insinuated themselves into its sanctuaries, turning piety into blasphemy, supplanting worship with scandal, and substituting the pursuit of secular power for eternal grace.

IRONICALLY, the purity of Christ's vision had been contaminated by its very popularity. As Christianity expanded through mass conversions, its evangelists had tempered their exhortations, accommodating their message to those whose souls they sought to save. Philanthropy, one of the Church's most admirable virtues, had become another source of vitiation. Donations poured in from the faithful, and the unspent wealth was passed up to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, where it accumulated and led to dissipation, debauchery, and — because spendthrifts are always running out of funds — demands for still more money. Here a dangerous solution presented itself, one which, when it was adopted, almost guaranteed future abuse. Ancient German custom offered convicted criminals a choice; they could be punished or, if they were wealthy, pay fines (*Wetrgeld*). Buying salvation was new to the Church. It was also sacrilegious. Early Christians had atoned for their sins by confession, absolution, and penance. Now it became possible to erase transgressions by buying indulgences. The papacy, searching for a scriptural precedent, settled on Matthew 16:19, in which Jesus tells Peter: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

On this shakiest of foundations the Holy See built a bureaucracy in which Peter's power, appropriated by pontiffs, was delegated to bishops, who passed it on to priests, who sent out friars in pursuit of sinners, empowered to judge the price to be paid for the sin, from which he deducted his commission. In Rome the contributions were welcomed and, in the beginning, used to finance hospitals, cathedrals, and crusades. Then other, less admirable causes appeared. Holy Fathers permitted those who had violated God's commandments to buy release from purgatory, thus encroaching on the sacrament of penance.

At the same time, the lawlessness and disorders of the Dark

Ages — particularly after the papacy had fallen under the dominance of feudal aristocrats in the ninth century — had led churchmen first to collaborate with secular rulers, and then to seek their subjugation. Pontiffs began by regulating the behavior of despots. Then they erected awesome cathedrals as symbols of their secular power, became enmeshed in political manipulations, and, finally, made war on their enemies.

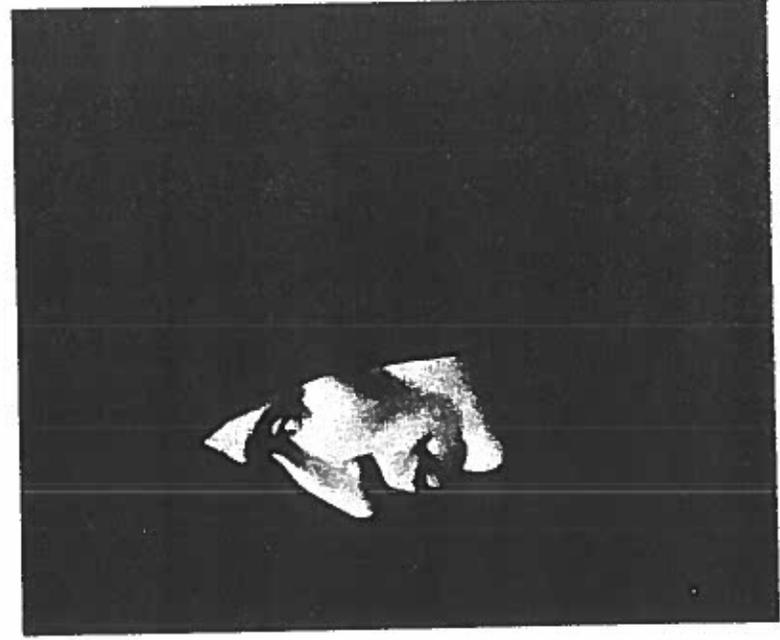
IN THE VERY BEGINNING the first Vicars of Christ had withdrawn from the world and its temptations. Now they became indistinguishable from the nobility. Once they had held the blessings of austerity to be inviolate, even renouncing marriage and cohabitation. Now celibacy yielded to widespread clerical concubinage and, in the convents, to promiscuity and homes for fatherless children born to women who had pledged their virtue as brides of Christ.

The precept that men of God should sleep alone, established by the Lateran Councils of 1123 and 1139 after nine hundred years of hemming and hawing, had begun to fray well before the dawn of the sixteenth century. Now it was a thing of shreds and patches. The last pontiff to take it seriously had died in 1471, and even he, during his youthful days as a bishop of Trieste, had slept with a succession of mistresses. A generation later the occupants of Saint Peter's chair were openly acknowledging their bandlings, endowing their sons with titles and their daughters with dowries.

In the Vatican nepotism ran amok. Sixtus IV (r. 1471-1484), upon donning the miter, appointed two of his nephews — both dissolute youths — to the sacred College of Cardinals. Later he put red hats on three more nephews and a grandnephew. He also named an eight-year-old boy archbishop of Lisbon and an eleven-year-old archbishop of Milan, though, quite apart from the fact that both were children, neither had received any religious instruction. Innocent VIII, who succeeded Sixtus in 1484, doted on Franceschetto Cibò, his son by a nameless courtesan. Innocent couldn't make a cardinal of Franceschetto. Standards had not deteriorated that far — yet — and the youth didn't seem interested. What excited him was roaming city streets each night with a pack of Roman hoodlums, gang-taping young women, some of them

he tossed lewd pictures, pornography, personal ornaments, cards, and gaming tables on the flames. To his multitudes he would roar: "Popes and prelates speak against pride and ambition and they are plunged into it up to their ears." The papal palace, he said, had literally become a house of prostitution where harlots "sit upon the throne of Solomon and signal to the passersby. Whoever can pay enters and does what he wishes."

Savonarola also charged the Vicar of Christ with simony and demanded that he be removed. Alexander at first responded warily, merely ordering the friar gagged. But Savonarola continued to defy him. The pontiff, he declared "is no longer a Christian. He is an infidel, a heretic, and as such has ceased to be pope." The



Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498)

nuns; sodomizing them and then leaving them unconscious, bloody, bruised, often with serious injuries, in the streets. The pope's son was not only a guttersnipe; he was also one of history's great spendthrifts. To support his lifestyle Innocent raised simony to new levels. By the time he found a suitable bride for Francesco, a Medici, he had to mortgage the papal tiara and treasury to pay for the wedding. Then he appointed his son's new brother-in-law to the sacred college. The new cardinal and future pope — Leo X — was fourteen years old.

Even Leo X (r. 1513-1521), who fathered no children, shared the passion to honor papal relatives. He began in 1513 with his first cousin, Giulio de' Medici, whose mother, all Rome knew, had been a casual partner at a drunken Holy Week frolic. By now there were precedents for conferring red hats on illegitimate sons; Alexander VI had put one on his own teenage bastard, Cesare Borgia. Leo had big plans for Giulio, so he perjured himself, swearing out an affidavit that the youth's parents had been secretly married. He then appointed five more members of his family, three nephews and two first cousins, to the cardinal's college. Meantime his hopes for Giulio, like Giulio himself, were maturing. The boy cardinal became a man, served his benefactor as chief minister, and, in 1523, became pope himself. However, it is just as well that Leo did not live to see his dream realized. As Clement VII, Giulio was to become the ultimate pontifical disaster.

UNDISCIPLINED BY PIETY, most of these popes were nonetheless remembered for their consummate skills in the brutal politics of the era. Only men with strong power bases of their own, notably leaders of great Italian families — the Sforzas, Medicis, Pazzis, Aragons — dared challenge them. At the turn of the century the most popular critic of Alexander VI, the Borgia pope, was a Florentine, Girolamo Savonarola of San Marco, a charismatic, idealistic Dominican friar with an enormous following in Florence, where he had introduced a democratic government free of corruption. Savonarola (1452-1498) was among those offended by Vatican orgies and Alexander's celebrated collection of pornography. The friar's protests took the form of annual "bonfires of the vanities" — carnivals in Florence's Piazza della Signoria, where

Holy Father tried to buy him off with a cardinal's hat. Savonarola indignantly rejected it — "A red hat?" he cried: "I want a hat of blood!" — and that was the end of him. Alexander excommunicated him; then, when Savonarola again defied him by continuing to celebrate Mass and give communion, the pope condemned him as a heretic, sentenced him to torture, and finally had him hanged and burned in the Piazza della Signoria.

The pontiffs of that time cannot be said to have been fastidious. They even executed their enemies in churches, where victims' bodyguards were likeliest to be caught off guard. Allying himself with the Pazzi family, who were challenging the Florentine power of Lorenzo de' Medici — Lorenzo the Magnificent — Pope Sixtus IV conspired with them to murder Lorenzo and his handsome brother Giuliano. He chose their most defenseless moment, when they were observing High Mass in the Florentine cathedral. The signal for the killers was the bell marking the elevation of the host. Giuliano fell at the altar, mortally wounded, but Lorenzo was not called magnificent for nothing. Drawing his long sword, he escaped into the sacristy and barricaded himself there until help arrived.

If the pope's attack says much about the era, so does Lorenzo's vengeance. On his instructions some of the Pazzi gang were hanged from balconies of the Palace of the Signoria while the rest were emasculated, dragged through the streets, hacked to death, and flung into the Arno. By medieval standards Lorenzo's revenge had not been excessive, though that cannot be said of Denmark's King Christian II, who invaded Sweden early in 1520. In January, Sten Sture, Sweden's leader, was killed in action. Heavy fighting continued throughout the year, however, and it was autumn before Sture's widow, Dame Christina Gyllensjerna, surrendered. Christian had promised her a general amnesty, but a king's word wasn't worth much then. He immediately broke his, and in spectacular fashion. First two Swedish bishops were beheaded in Stockholm's public square at midnight, November 8, while eighty of their parishioners, who had been summoned to witness the execution, were butchered where they stood. The Danish king then disinterred Sten Sture's remains. After ten months in the grave they were scarcely recognizable. Rotting,

crawling with maggots, emitting a nauseous stench, the corpse was nevertheless burned. Next Sture's small son was flung — alive — into the flames. Then Dame Christina, who had been forced to watch all this, was sentenced to live out her days as a common prostitute.



WHAT WAS the world like — and to them it was the *only* world, round which the sun orbited each day — when ruled by such men? Imagination alone can reconstruct it. If a modern European could be transported back five centuries through a kind of time warp, and suspended high above earth in one of those balloons which fascinated Jules Verne, he would scarcely recognize his own continent. Where, he would wonder, looking down, are all the people? Westward from Russia to the Atlantic, Europe was covered by the same trackless forest primeval the Romans had confronted fifteen hundred years earlier, when, according to Tacitus's *De Germania*, Julius Caesar interviewed men who had spent two months walking from Poland to Gaul without once glimpsing sunlight. One reason the lands east of the Rhine and north of the Danube had proved unconquerable to legions commanded by Caesar and over seventy other Roman consuls was that, unlike the other territories he subdued, they lacked roads.

But there *were* people there in A.D. 1500. Beneath the deciduous canopy, most of them toiling from sunup to sundown, dwelt nearly 73 million people, and although that was less than a tenth of the continent's modern population, there were enough Europeans to establish patterns and precedents still viable today. Twenty million of them lived in what was known as the Holy Roman Empire — which, in the hoary classroom witticism, was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. It was in fact central Europe: Germany and her bordering territories.* There were 15 million souls in France, Europe's most populous country. Thirteen

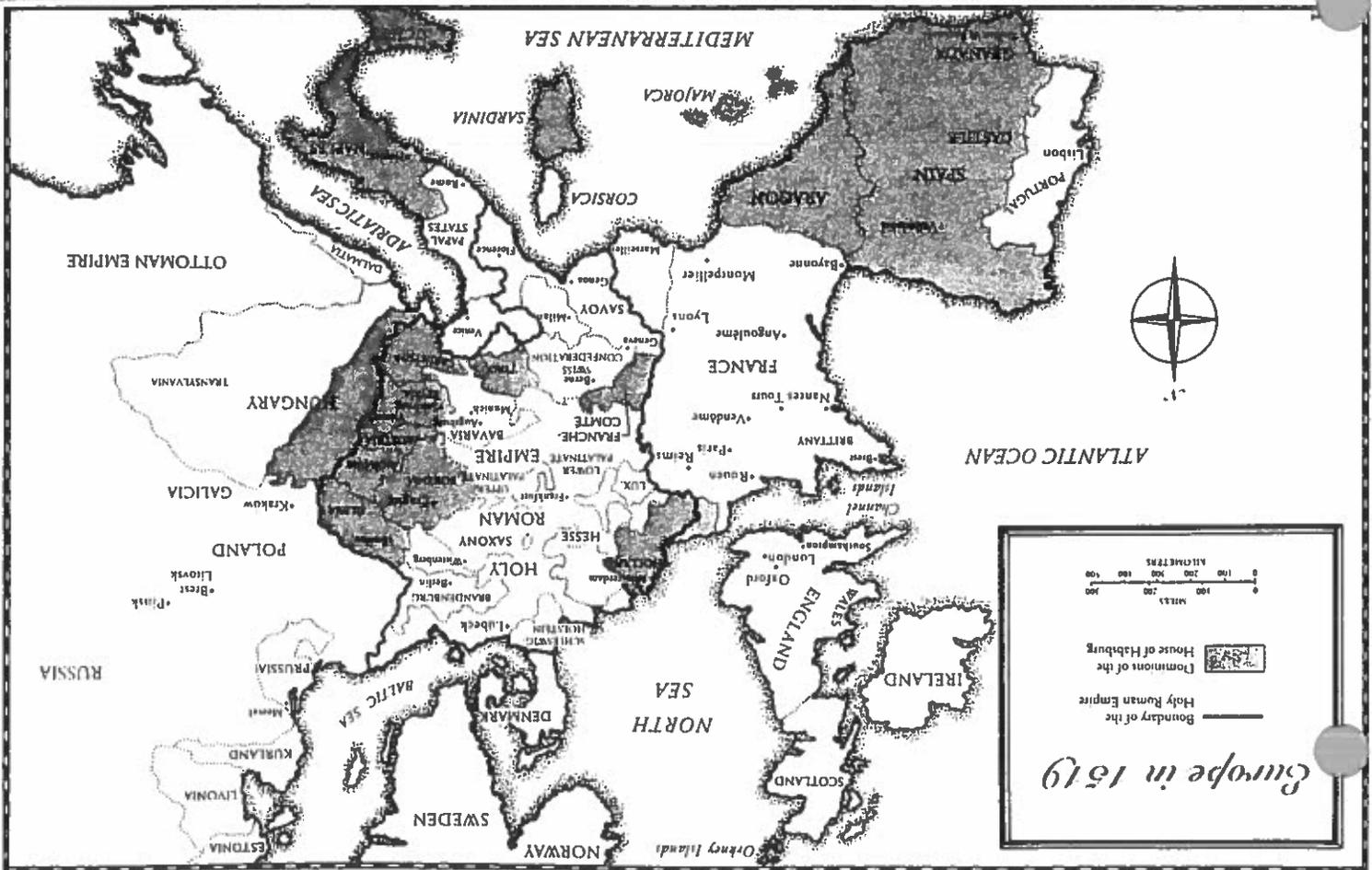
*The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, as it was called after the mid-1400s, was also the First Reich, a cultural nation (*Kulturvolk*) of some three hundred different sovereign states. After Prussia's victory in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, Otto von Bismarck created the Second Reich, a nation-state (*Staatsvolk*) over which the Hohenzollerns reigned until its defeat in 1918. The Third Reich (1933-1945) was, of course, Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany.

million lived in Italy, where the population was densest, 8 million in Spain, and a mere 4.5 million — the number of Philadelphians in 1990 — in England and Wales.

A voyager into the past would search in vain for the sprawling urban complexes which have dominated the continent since the Industrial Revolution transformed it some two hundred years ago. In 1500 the three largest cities in Europe were Paris, Naples, and Venice, with about 150,000 each. The only other communities with more than 100,000 inhabitants were situated by the sea, rivers, or trading centers: Seville, Genoa, and Milan, each of them about the size of Reno, Nevada; Eugene, Oregon; or Beaumont, Texas. Even among the celebrated *Reichsstädte* of the empire, only Cologne housed over 40,000 people. Other cities were about the same: Pisa had 40,000 citizens; Montpellier, the largest municipality in southern France, 40,000; Florence 70,000; Barcelona 50,000; Valencia 30,000; Augsburg 20,000; Nuremberg 15,000; Antwerp and Brussels 20,000. London was by far England's largest town, with 50,000 Londoners; only 10,000 Englishmen lived in Bristol, the second-largest.

Twentieth-century urban areas are approached by superhighways, with skylines looming in the background. Municipalities were far humbler then. Emerging from the forest and following a dirt path, a stranger would confront the grim walls and turrets of a town's defenses. Visible beyond them would be the gabled roofs of the well-ro-do, the huge square tower of the donjon, the spires of parish churches, and, dwarfing them all, the soaring mass of the local cathedral.

If the bishop's seat was the spiritual heart of the community, the donjon, overshadowing the public square, was its secular nucleus. On its roofs, twenty-four hours a day, stood watchmen, ready to strike the alarm bells at the first sign of attack or fire. Below them lay the council chamber, where elders gathered to confer and vote; beneath that, the city archives; and, in the cellar, the dungeon and the living quarters of the hangman, who was kept far busier than any executioner today. Sixteenth-century men did not believe that criminal characters could be reformed or corrected, and so there were no reformatories or correctional institutions. Indeed, prisons as we know them did not exist. Maiming



and the lash were common punishments; for convicted felons the rope was commoner still.

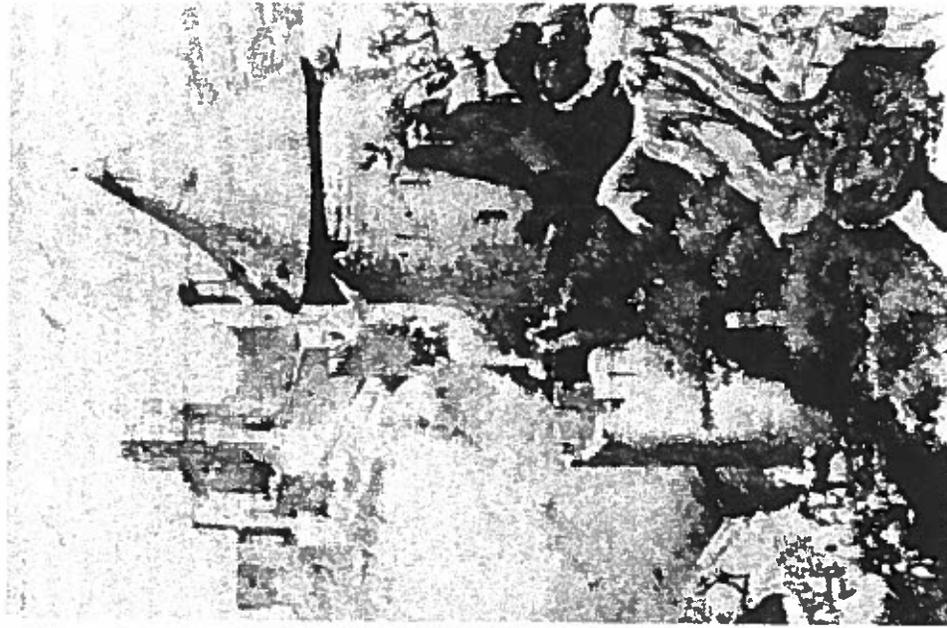
The donjon was the last line of defense, but it was the wall, the first line of defense, which determined the propinquity inside it. The smaller its circumference, the safer (and cheaper) the wall was. Therefore the land within was invaluable, and not an inch of it could be wasted. The twisting streets were as narrow as the breadth of a man's shoulders, and pedestrians bore bruises from collisions with one another. There was no paving; shops opened directly on the streets, which were filthy; excrement, urine, and offal were simply flung out windows.

And it was easy to get lost. Sunlight rarely reached ground level, because the second story of each building always jutted out over the first, the third over the second, and the fourth and fifth stories over those lower. At the top, at a height approaching that of the great wall, burghers could actually shake hands with neighbors across the way. Rain rarely fell on pedestrians, for which they were grateful, and little air or light, for which they weren't. At night the town was scary. Watchmen patrolled it — once clocks arrived, they would call, "One o'clock and all's well!" — and heavy chains were stretched across street entrances to foil the flight of thieves. Nevertheless rogues lurked in dark corners.

One neighborhood of winding little alleys offered signs, for those who could read them, that the feudal past was receding. Here were found the butcher's lane, the papermaker's street, tanners' row, cobblers' shops, saddlemakers, and even a small bookshop. Their significance lay in their commerce. Europe had developed a new class: the merchants. The hubs of medieval business had been Venice, Naples, and Milan — among only a handful of cities with over 100,000 inhabitants. Then the Medicis of Florence had entered banking. Finally, Germany's century-old Hanseatic League stirred itself and, overtaking the others, for a time dominated trade.

The Hansa, a league of some seventy medieval towns centering around Bremen, Hamburg, and Lübeck, was originally formed in the thirteenth century to combat piracy and overcome foreign trade restrictions. It reached its apogee when a new generation of rich traders and bankers came to power. Foremost among them

was the Fugger family. Having started as peasant weavers in Augsburg, not a Hanseatic town, the Fuggers expanded into the mining of silver, copper, and mercury. As moneylenders, they became immensely wealthy, controlling Spanish customs and extending their power throughout Spain's overseas empire. Their influence stretched from Rome to Budapest, from Lisbon to Danzig, from



A sixteenth-century town wall

Moscow to Chile. In their banking role, they loaned millions of ducats to kings, cardinals, and the Holy Roman emperor, financing wars, propping up popes, and underwriting new adventures — putting up the money, for example, that King Carlos of Spain gave Magellan in commissioning his voyage around the world. In the early sixteenth century the family patriarch was Jakob Fugger II, who first emerged as a powerful figure in 1505, when he secretly bought the crown jewels of Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy. Jakob first became a count in Kirchberg and Weisserhorn; then, in 1514 the emperor Maximilian I — *der gross Max* — acknowledged the Fuggers' role as his chief financial supporter for thirty years by making him a hereditary knight of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1516, by negotiating complex loans, Jakob made Henry VIII of England a Fugger ally. It was a tribute to the family's influence, and to the growth of trade everywhere, that a year later the Church's Fifth Lateran Council lifted its age-old prohibition of usury.

Each European town of any size had its miniature Fugger, a merchant whose home in the marketplace typically rose five stories and was built with beams filled in with stucco, mortar, and laths. Storerooms were piled high with expensive Oriental rugs and containers of powdered spices; clerks at high desks pored over accounts; the owner and his wife, though of peasant birth, wore gold lace and even ignored laws forbidding anyone not nobly born to wear furs. In the manner of a grand seigneur the merchant would chat with patrician customers as though he were their equal. Impoverished knights, resenting this, ambushed merchants in the forest and cut off their right hands. It was a cruel and futile gesture; commerce had arrived to stay, and the knights were just leaving. Besides, the adversaries were mismatched. The true rivals of the mercantile class were the clerics. Subtly but inexorably the bourgeois would replace the clergy in the continental power structure.

THE TOWN, HOWEVER, was not typical of Europe. In the early 1500s one could hike through the woods for days without encountering a settlement of any size. Between 80 and 90 percent of the population (the peasantry; serfdom had been abolished everywhere except in remote pockets of Germany) lived in villages of

fewer than a hundred people, fifteen or twenty miles apart, surrounded by endless woodlands. They slept in their small, cramped hamlets, which afforded little privacy, but they worked — entire families, including expectant mothers and toddlers — in the fields and pastures between their huts and the great forest. It was brutish toil, but absolutely necessary to keep the wolf from the door. Wheat had to be beaten out by flails, and not everyone owned a plowshare. Those who didn't borrowed or rented when possible; when it was impossible, they broke the earth awkwardly with mattocks.

Knights, of course, experienced none of this. In their castles — or, now that the cannon had rendered castle defenses obsolete, their new manor houses — they played backgammon, chess, or checkers (which was called *crometrizia* in Italy, *dames* in France, and draughts in England). Hunting, hawking, and falconry were their outdoor passions. A visitor from the twentieth century would find their homes uncomfortable: damp, cold, and reeking from primitive sanitation, for plumbing was unknown. But in other ways they were attractive and spacious. Ceilings were timbered,

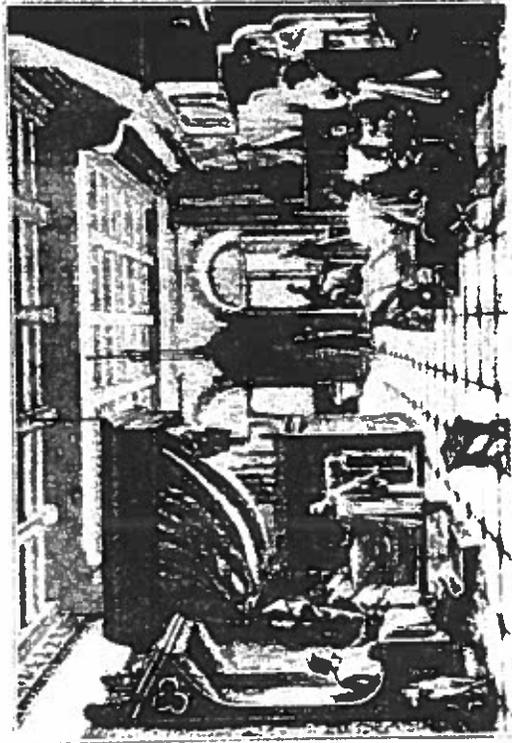


A medieval fair: customers, cloth merchants, a beggar, a draper's shop, a money-weigher, mountebanks

floors tiled (carpets were just beginning to come into fashion); tapestries covered walls, windows were glass. The great central hall of the crumbling castles had been replaced by a vestibule at the entrance, which led to a living room dominated by its massive hearth, and, beyond that, a "drawto chamber," or "(with) drawing room" for private talks and a "parler" for general conversations and meals.

Gluttony wallowed in its nauseous excesses at tables spread in the halls of the mighty. The everyday dinner of a man of rank ran from fifteen to twenty dishes; England's earl of Warwick, who fed as many as five hundred guests at a sitting, used six oxen a day at the evening meal. The oxen were not as succulent as they sound; by tradition, the meat was kept salted in vats against the possibility of a siege, and boiled in a great copper vat. Even so, enormous quantities of it were ingested and digested. On special occasions a whole stag might be roasted in the great fireplace, crisped and larded, then cut up in quarters, doused in a steaming pepper sauce, and served on outsized plates.

The hearth excepted, the home of a prosperous peasant lacked these amenities. Lying at the end of a narrow, muddy lane, his



Home of a medieval nobleman

rambling edifice of thatch, wattles, mud, and dirty brown wood was almost obscured by a towering dung heap in what, without it, would have been the front yard. The building was large, for it was more than a dwelling. Beneath its sagging roof were a pigpen, a henhouse, cattle sheds, corncribs, straw and hay, and, last and not least, the family's apartment, actually a single room whose walls and timbers were coated with soot. According to Erasmus, who examined such huts, "almost all the floors are of clay and rushes from the marshes, so carelessly renewed that the foundation sometimes remains for twenty years, harboring, there below, spittle and vomit and wine of dogs and men, beer . . . remnants of fishes, and other filth unnameable. Hence, with the change of weather, a vapor exhales which in my judgment is far from wholesome."

The centerpiece of the room was a gigantic bedstead, piled high with straw pallets, all seething with vermin. Everyone slept there, regardless of age or gender — grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren, and hens and pigs — and if a couple chose to enjoy intimacy, the others were aware of every movement. In summer they could even watch. If a stranger was staying the night, hospitality required that he be invited to make "one more" on the familial mattress. This was true even if the head of the household was away, on, say, a pilgrimage. If this led to goings-on, and the husband returned to discover his wife with child, her readiest reply was that during the night, while she was sleeping, she had been penetrated by an incubus. Theologians had confirmed that such monsters existed and that it was their demonic mission to impregnate lonely women lost in slumber. (Priests offered the same explanation for boys' wet dreams.) Even if the infant bore a striking similarity to someone other than the head of the household, and tongues wagged as a result, direct accusations were rare. Cuckolds were figures of fun; a man was reluctant to identify himself as one. Of course, when unmarried girls found themselves with child and told the same tale, they met with more skepticism.

If this familial situation seems primitive, it should be borne in mind that these were *prosperous* peasants. Not all their neighbors were so lucky. Some lived in tiny cabins of crossed laths stuffed with grass or straw, inadequately shielded from rain, snow, and wind. They lacked even a chimney; smoke from the cabin's fire

left through a small hole in the thatched roof — where, unsurprisingly, fires frequently broke out. These homes were without glass windows or shutters; in a storm, or in frigid weather, openings in the walls could only be stuffed with straw, rags — whatever was handy. Such families envied those enjoying greater comfort, and most of all they coveted their beds. They themselves slept on thin straw pallets covered by ragged blankets. Some were without blankets. Some didn't even have pallets.

Typically, three years of harvests could be expected for one year of famine. The years of hunger were terrible. The peasants might be forced to sell all they owned, including their pitifully inadequate clothing, and be reduced to nudity in all seasons. In the hardest times they devoured bark, roots, grass; even white clay. Cannibalism was not unknown. Strangers and travelers were waylaid and killed to be eaten, and there are tales of gallows being torn down — as many as twenty bodies would hang from a single scaffold — by men frantic to eat the warm flesh raw.

However, in the good years, when they ate, they ate. To avoid dining in the dark, there were only two meals a day — “dinner” at 10 A.M. and “supper” at 5 P.M. — but bountiful harvests meant tables which groaned. Although meat was rare on the Continent, there were often huge pork sausages, and always enormous rolls of black bread (white bread was the prerogative of the patriciate) and endless courses of soup: cabbage, watercress, and cheese soups; “dried peas and bacon water.” “poor man’s soup” from odds and ends, and during Lent, of course, fish soup. Every meal was washed down by flagons of wine in Italy and France, and, in Germany or England, ale or beer. “Small beer” was the traditional drink, though since the crusaders’ return from the East many preferred “spiced beer,” seasoned with cinnamon, resin, gentian, and juniper. Under Henry VII and Henry VIII the per capita allowance was a gallon of beer a day — even for nuns and eight-year-old children. Sir John Fortescue observed that the English “drink no water, unless at certain times upon religious score, or by way of doing penance.”

THIS MUST HAVE LED to an exceptional degree of intoxication, for people then were small. The average man stood a few inches over

five feet and weighed about 135 pounds. His wife was shorter and lighter. Anyone standing several inches over six feet was considered a giant and inspired legends — Jack the Giant Killer, for example, and Jack and the Beanstalk. Folklore was rich in such violent tales, for death was their constant companion. Life expectancy was brief; half the people in Europe died, usually from disease, before reaching their thirtieth birthday. It was still true, as Richard Rolle had written earlier, that “few men now reach the age of forty, and fewer still the age of fifty.” If a man passed that milestone, his chances of reaching his late forties or his early fifties were good, though he looked much older; at forty-five his hair was as white, back as bent, and face as knurled as an octogenarian’s today. The same was true of his wife — “Old Gretel,” a woman in her thirties might be called. In longevity she was less fortunate than her husband. The toll at childbirth was appalling. A young girl’s life expectancy was twenty-four. On her wedding day, traditionally, her mother gave her a piece of fine cloth which could be made into a frock. Six or seven years later it would become her shroud.

Clothing served as a kind of uniform, designating status. Some raiment was stigmatic. Lepers were required to wear gray coats and red hats, the skirts of prostitutes had to be scarlet, public penitents wore white robes, released heretics carried crosses sewn on both sides of their chests — you were expected to pray as you passed them — and the breast of every Jew, as stipulated by law, bore a huge yellow circle. The rest of society belonged to one of the three great classes: the nobility, the clergy, and the commons. Establishing one’s social identity was important. Each man knew his place, believed it had been foreordained in heaven, and was aware that what he wore must reflect it.

To be sure, certain fashions were shared by all. Styles had changed since Greece and Rome shimmered in their glory; then garments had been *wrapped* on; now all classes *put* them on and fastened them. Most clothing — except the leather gauntlets and leggings of hunters, and the crude animal skins worn by the very poor — was now woven of wool. (Since few Europeans possessed a change of clothes, the same raiment was worn daily; as a consequence, skin diseases were astonishingly prevalent.) But there

was no mistaking the distinctions between the parson in his vestments; the toiler in his dirty cloth tunic, loose trousers, and heavy boots; and the aristocrat with his jewelry, his hairdress, and his extravagant finery. Every knight wore a signet ring, and wearing fur was as much a sign of knighthood as wearing a sword or carrying a falcon. Indeed, in some European states it was illegal for anyone *not* nobly born to adorn himself with fur. "Many a tippet of black lambskin, even in the hottest weather, merely to prove that he is not a villein."

Furred (and feathered) hats were favored by patricians; so were flowered robes and fancy jackets bulging at the sleeves. It was considered appropriate for the nobly born to flaunt the distinguishing marks of their sex. This had not changed since the death of Chaucer a century earlier. Chaucer himself — who as a page had worn a flaming costume with one hose red and one black — nevertheless deplored, in *The Canterbury Tales*, the custom of wearing trousers with codpieces over the genitalia. This flaunting of "shameful privy membres," he wrote, by men with "horrible swollen membres that they shewe thugh disgisyng [disguise]," also made "the buttocks . . . as it were, the hyndre part of a sheape in the fulle of the moone."

He was even more offended by "the outrageous array of women, God wot that the visages of somme of them seem ful chaste and debonaire, yet notifie they" by "the horrible disordinate scantiness" of their dress their "likerousnesse [lecherousness] and pride." Both sexes were advertising, not flirting, and they were certainly not blushing; when challenged, by all accounts, they responded eagerly.

IT WAS A TIME when the social lubricants of civility, and the small but essential trivia of civilized life, were just beginning to re-emerge, phoenixlike, from the medieval ashes. Learning, like etiquette, was being rediscovered. For example, the arithmetic symbols + and — did not come back into general use until the late 1400s. Spectacles for the shortsighted were unavailable until around 1520. Lead pencils had appeared at the turn of the century, together with the first postal service (between Vienna and Brus-

sels). However, Peter Henlein's "Nuremberg Egg," the first watch, said to have been invented in 1502, is now regarded as a myth. Small table clocks and watches, telling time to the hour, would not begin to appear in Italy and Germany until the last quarter of the century. Bartolomew Newsam is said to have built the first English standing clock in 1585.

In all classes, table manners were atrocious. Men behaved like boors at meals. They customarily ate with their hats on and frequently beat their wives at table, while chewing a sausage or gnawing at a bone. Their clothes and their bodies were filthy. The story was often told of the peasant in the city who, passing a lane of perfume shops, fainted at the unfamiliar scent and was revived by holding a shovel of excrement under his nose. Pocket handkerchiefs did not appear until the early 1500s, and it was midcentury before they came into general use. Even sovereigns wiped their noses on their sleeves, or, more often, on their footmen's sleeves. Napkins were also unknown; guests were warned not to clean their teeth on the tablecloth. Guests in homes were also reminded that they should blow their noses with the hand that held the knife, not the one holding the food.

There is some dispute about when cutlery was introduced. Apparently knives were first provided by guests, who carried them in sheaths attached to their belts. According to Erasmus, decorum dictated that food be brought to the mouth with one's fingers. The fork is mentioned in the fifteenth century, but was used then only to serve dishes. As tableware it was not laid out in the French court until 1589, though it had appeared at a Venetian ducal banquet in 1520; writing in his diary afterward, Jacques LeSaige, a French silk merchant who had been among the guests, noted with wonder: "These seigneurs, when they want to take the meat up, use a silver fork."

There *was* such a thing as bad form, but it had nothing to do with manners. Any breach of rules established by the Church was a grave offense. Except for the Jews, of whom there were perhaps a million in Europe, every European was expected to venerate, above all others, the Virgin Mary — Queen of the Holy City, Lady of Heaven, *la Beata Vergine, die heilige Jungfrau, la Virgen María, la Daine débonnaire* — followed by her vassals, the Catholic

saints, who did her liege homage. Parishioners were required to hear Mass at least once a week (for knights it was daily); to hate the Saracens and, of course, the Jews; to honor holy places and sacred objects; and to keep the major fasts.

Fasts were the greatest challenge faced by the faithful, and not all were equal to it. In one Breton village the devout affirmed their Lenten piety by joining a procession led by a priest. Afterward one marching woman, who had worn a particularly saintly expression during the parade, retired to her kitchen and elatedly broke Lent by heating, and eating, mutton and ham. The aroma drifted out the window. It was identified by passersby. Seized, she was brought before the local bishop, who sentenced her to walk the village streets until Easter, a month away, with the ham slung around her neck and the quarter of mutton, on its spit, over her shoulder. Ineluctably — and another sign of the age — a jeering mob followed her every step.

▣ THAT WAS a relatively minor infraction. Greater crimes provoked awesome rites. A drunken, irreverent baron found himself in deep trouble after stealing the chalice of a parish church. He had been seen galloping away with it. The local bishop ordered the church bell tolled in the mournful cadence usually reserved for major funerals. The church itself was draped in black. The congregation gathered in the nave. Amid a frightful hush the prelate, surrounded by his clergymen, each carrying a lighted candle, appeared in the chancel and pronounced the name of the thief, shouting: "Let him be cursed in the city and cursed in the field; cursed in his granary, his harvest, and his children; as Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up by the gaming earth, so may hell swallow him. And even as today we quench these torches in our hands, so may the light of his life be quenched for all eternity, unless he do repent!"

As the priests flung their candles down and stamped them out, the parishioners trembled for the knight's soul, which, they knew, had very little chance of surviving so awful an imprecation. The wayward baron was now an outlaw; every man's hand was against him; neither lepers nor Jews were so completely isolated. This social exile was a formidable weapon, and it brought the sinner to his knees, for eventually he bought back his salvation — at a

formidable price. First he donated his entire fortune to the bishop. Then he appeared at the chancel barefoot, wearing a pilgrim's robe. For twenty-four hours he lay prostrate before the high altar, praying and fasting; then he knelt while sixty monks and priests clubbed him. As each blow fell he yelled, "Just are thy judgments, O Lord!" At last, when he lay bleeding, bones broken and senses impaired, the bishop absolved him and gave him the kiss of peace.

The punishment seems excessive. Such a chalice, not fashioned from precious metal, had little monetary value; its theft had merely been an act of petty larceny. But the medieval Church was strong on law and order, and had this felony gone unpunished, the aftermath could have led to laxity, backsliding, even mutiny. Besides, there were greater sinners than the scourged baron, and crueler penances. For them the road to atonement was literally a series of roads, to be covered, over six, ten, or even twelve years in that greatest of penances, the pilgrimage.

In instances in which pilgrims had offended God and man, their journeys were actually a substitute for prison terms. European castles had dungeons — so did the Vatican — but they couldn't begin to hold the miscreant population. The chief legal penalty was execution. There were alternatives in lay courts — ears were cut off, tongues ripped out, eyes gouged from their sockets; the genitalia of wives who had betrayed their husbands were cauterized with white-hot tongs — but these, although extremely unpleasant, offered no hope for salvation. The violator still faced a wretched afterlife in Hades, and obviously everyone who had violated the law did not deserve that. Therefore the Church, which had its own legal system, paralleling secular courts, took over.

Offenders were ordered to shave their heads, abandon their families, fast constantly (meat only once a day), and set out barefoot for a far destination. Journey's end varied from offender to offender. Rome was a popular choice. Some were sent all the way to Jerusalem. The general rule was the longer the distance, the greater the atonement. If of noble birth, the penitent had to wear chains on his neck and wrists forged from his own armor, a sign of how far he had fallen. Frequently the felon carried a passport, signed by a bishop, specifying his crimes in the grimmest possible detail and then asking good Christians to offer him food and

lodging. From the felon's point of view this approach may have seemed flawed, but his opinion was unsolicited. And ecclesiastical verdicts could seldom be appealed.

Some men, in their search for absolution, suffered almost unendurable ordeals. The notorious Count Fulk the Black of Anjou, whose crimes were legendary, finally realized that his immortal soul was in peril and, while miserable in the throes of his conscience, begged for divine mercy. Count Fulk had sinned for twenty years. Among other things he had murdered his wife, though this charge had been dropped on the strength of his unsupported word that he had found her rutting behind a barn with a goatherd. The court felt helpless here. Decapitation on the spot was the fate of an adulteress caught in the act; adulterers usually went free, to be dealt with by the husbands they had wronged. In this case there had been no witnesses, and the goatherd had vanished, but counts, even wicked counts, did not lie. However, quite apart from that, Fulk the Black's catalog of crimes was a long one. He expected a heavy sentence, and that is what he got. He is said to have fainted when it was passed. Shackled, he was condemned to a triple Jerusalem pilgrimage: across most of France and Savoy, over the Alps, through the Papal States, Carinthia, Hungary, Bosnia, mountainous Serbia, Bulgaria, Constantinople, and the length of mountainous Anatolia, then down through modern Syria and Jordan to the holy city. In irons, his fleet bleeding, he made this round trip three times — 15,300 miles — and the last time he was dragged through the streets on a hurdle while two well-muscled men lashed his naked back with bullwhips.

THE COUNT could have asked, though he didn't, what all this misery had to do with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact it had nothing to do with them. The distinction between devotion and superstition has always been unclear, but there was little blurring here. Although they called themselves Christians, medieval Europeans were ignorant of the Gospels. The Bible existed only in a language they could not read. The mumbled incantations at Mass were meaningless to them. They believed in sorcery, witchcraft, hobgoblins, werewolves, amulets, and black magic, and were thus indistinguishable from pagans. If a lady died, the instant

her breath stopped servants ran through the manor house, emptying every container of water to prevent her soul from drowning, and before her funeral the corpse was carefully watched to prevent any dog or cat from running across the coffin, thus changing her remains into a vampire. Meantime her lord, praying for her salvation, was lying prostrate, his head turned eastward and his arms stretched out, forming a cross. Nothing in the New Testament supported such delusions and rituals; nevertheless the precautions were taken — with the blessings of the clergy. In monastic manuscripts one repeatedly finds such entries as: "Common report has it that Antichrist has been born at Babylon and that the Day of Judgment is nigh." The alarm was spread so often that the peasants ignored it; on the Sabbath, after an early Mass, they would gossip, dance, sing, wrestle, race, and compete in archery contests until evening shadows deepened. There was hell enough on earth for them; they were too drained to ponder the risks of another world.

Nevertheless in pensive moments they worried. Should the left eye of a corpse not close properly, they knew, the departed would soon have company in purgatory. If a man donned a clean white shirt on a Friday, or saw a shooting star, or a will-o'-the-wisp in the marshes, or a vulture hovering over his home, his death was very near. Similarly, a woman stupid enough to wash clothes during Holy Week would soon be in her grave. Should thirteen people be so thoughtless as to sup at one table, one of those present would not be there for tomorrow morning's meal; if a wolf howled through the night, one who heard him would disappear before dawn. Comets and eclipses were sinister. Everyone knew that an enormous comet had been sighted in July 1198 and Richard the Lion-Hearted had died "very soon after." (In fact he did not die until April 6, 1199.)

Everyone also knew — and every child was taught — that the air all around them was infested with invisible, soulless spirits, some benign but most of them evil, dangerous, long-lived, and hard to kill; that among them were the souls of unbaptized infants, ghouls who snuffed out cadavers in graveyards and chewed their bones, water nymphs skilled at luring knights to death by drowning, dracs who carried little children off to their caves beneath the earth, wolfmen — the undead turned into ravenous beasts — and

vampires who rose from their tombs at dusk to suck the blood of men, women, or children who had strayed from home. At any moment, under any circumstances, a person could be removed from the world of the senses to a realm of magic creatures and occult powers. Every natural object possessed supernatural qualities. Books interpreting dreams were highly popular.

The stars were known to be guided by angels, and physicians were constantly consulting astrologers and theologians. Doctors diagnosing illnesses were influenced by the constellation under which the patient had been born or taken sick; thus the eminent surgeon Guy de Chauliac wrote: "If anyone is wounded in the neck when the moon is at Taurus, the affliction will be dangerous." Thousands of pitiful people disfigured by swollen lymph nodes in their necks mobbed the kings of England and France, believing that their scrofula could be cured by the touch of a royal hand. One document from the period is a calendar, published at Mainz, which designates the best astrological times for bloodletting. Epidemics were attributed to unfortunate configurations of the stars. Now and then a quack was unmasked; in London one Roger Clerk, who had pretended to cure ailments with spurious charms, was sentenced to ride through the city with urinals hanging from his neck. But others, equally bogus, lived out their lives unchallenged.

Scholars as eminent as Erasmus and Sir Thomas More accepted the existence of witchcraft. Conspicuous fakes excepted, the Church encouraged superstitions, recommended trust in faith healers, and spread tales of satyrs, incubi, sirens, cyclops, tritons, and giants, explaining that all were manifestations of Satan. The Prince of Darkness, it taught, was as real as the Holy Trinity. Certainly belief in him was useful; prelates agreed that when it came to keeping the masses on the straight and narrow, fear of the devil was a stronger force than the love of God. Great shows were made of exorcisms. The story spread across the continent of how the fiend entered a man's body and croaked blasphemy through his mouth until a priest, following a magic rite, recited an incantation. The devil, foiled, screamed horribly and fled.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy, through its priests and monks, repeatedly affirmed the legitimacy of specific miracles. Unshriven sinners were not the only pilgrims on Europe's roads. In fact, they

were a minority. The majority were simple people, identifiable by their brown wool robes, heavy staffs, and sacks slung from their belts. Their motivation was simple devotion, often concern for a recently departed relative now in purgatory. Although filthy and untidy, they were rarely abused; few wanted to lose the scriptural blessing reserved for those who, having shown kindness to a stranger, had "entertained angels unawares."

Pilgrims headed for over a thousand shrines whose miracles had been recognized by Rome. There was Our Lady of Chartres, Our Lady of the Rose at Lucca, Our Guardian Lady in Genoa, and other Our Ladies at Le Puy, Auray, Grenoble, Valenciennes, Liesse, Rocamadour, Ossier. . . . It went on and on. One popular destination was the tomb of Pierre de Luxembourg, a cardinal who had died, aged eighteen, of anorexia; within fifteen months of his death 1,964 miracles were credited to the magic he had left in his bones. Some saints were regarded as medical specialists; victims of cholera headed for a chapel of Saint Vitus, who was believed to be particularly efficacious for that disease.

But nothing could compete with the two star attractions: scenes actually visited by the savior himself and spectacular phenomena confirmed by the Vatican. At Santa Maria Maggiore, people were told, they could see the actual manger where Christ was born, or, at St. John Lateran, the holy steps Jesus ascended while wearing his crown of thorns, or, at St. Peter in Montorio, the place where Peter was martyred by Nero. Englishmen believed that the venerable abbot of St. Germer need only bless a fountain and lo! its waters would heal the sick, restore sight to the blind, and make the dumb speak. Once, according to pilgrims, the abbot had visited a village parched for lack of water. He led the peasants into the church, and, as they watched, smote a stone with his staff. Behold! Water gushed forth, not only to slake thirsts but also possessing miraculous powers to cure all pain and illness.

TRAVEL WAS slow, expensive, uncomfortable — and perilous. It was slowest for those who rode in coaches, faster for walkers, and fastest for horsemen, who were few because of the need to change and stable steeds. The expenses chiefly arose from the countless tolls, the discomfort from a score of irritants. Bridges spanning

rivers were shaky (priests recommended that before crossing them travelers commend themselves to God); other streams had to be forded; the roads were deplorable — mostly trails and muddy ruts, impassable, except in summer, by two-wheeled carts — and nights en route had to be spent in Europe's wretched inns. These were unsanitary places, the beds wedged against one another, blankets crawling with roaches, rats, and fleas; whores plied their trade and then slipped away with a man's money, and innkeepers seized guests' baggage on the pretext that they had not paid.

The peril came from highwaymen, whose mythic joys and miseries were celebrated by the Parisian François Villon. In reality there was nothing attractive about these criminals in the woods. They were pitiless thieves, kidnapers, and killers, and they flourished because they were so seldom pursued. Between towns the traveler was on his own. Except in a few places like Castile, where roads were patrolled by the archers of the Santa Hermandad, no policemen were stationed in the open country. Outlaws had always lurked in the woods, but their menace had increased as their ranks were thickened by impoverished knights returning from the ill-starred crusades, demobilized veterans of various foreign campaigns, and, in England, renegades from the recent War of the Roses. Sometimes these brigands traveled in roving gangs, waiting to ambush strangers; sometimes they stood by the road disguised as beggars or pilgrims, knives at the ready. Even gallant seigneurs declined responsibility for travelers passing through their lands at night, and many a less-principled sire was either a bandit himself or an accomplice of outlaws, overlooking their outrages provided they hold important personages harmless and present him with lavish gifts at Christmas.

Therefore honest travelers carried well-honed daggers, knowing they might have to kill and hoping they would have the stomach for it. Wayfarers from different lands usually banded together, seeking collective security, though they often excluded Englishmen, who in that age were distrusted, suspected of petty thefts, regarded by seamen as pirates, and notorious for the false weights and shoddy goods of their merchants. Even Britons like Chaucer, who denounced greed, were themselves greedy. Their women were unwelcome for another reason. They were so foul-mouthed

that Joan of Arc always referred to them as "the Goddams." And the English of both sexes were known, even then, for their insolence. In 1500 the Venetian ambassador to London reported to his government that his hosts were "great lovers of themselves, and of everything belonging to them; they think there are no other men than themselves, and no other country but England; and whenever they see a handsome foreigner they say that 'he looks like an Englishman,' and that it is a great pity that he is not one."

Doubtless the same thing could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of other people, but Englishmen, aware of their reputation, always went abroad heavily armed — unless they were rich. Surrounded by bands of knights in full armor, wealthy Europeans traveled in painted, gilded, carved, and curtained horse-drawn coaches. They knew they were marks for thieves, and never left their fiefs to visit cities, or attend the great August fairs, unless heavily guarded.

A YORKSHIRE gravestone bears this inscription:

*Hear underneath dis laihl stean
las Robert earl of Huntingtun
neer arcir yer az hie se geud
And pipl kauld in Robin Heud
sick utlawz as he an iz men
il england niwr si aggen
Obiit 24 kal Decembris 1247*

Robin Hood lived; this marker confirms it, just as the Easter tables attest to the existence of the great Arthur. But that is *all* the tombstone does. Everything we know about that period suggests that Robin was merely another wellborn cutthroat who hid in shrubbery by roadsides, waiting to rob helpless wayfarers. The possibility that he stole from the rich and gave to the poor is, like the tale of that other cold-blooded rogue, Jesse James, highly unlikely. Even unlikely is the conceit that Robin Hood, aka Heud, was accompanied by a bedmate called Maid Marian, a giant known as Little John, and a lapsed Catholic named Friar Tuck. Almost

certainly they were creatures of an ingenious folk imagination, and their contemporary, the sheriff of Nottingham, is probably the most libeled law enforcement officer in this millennium.

The more we study those remote centuries, the unlikelier such legends become. Later mythmakers invested the Middle Ages with a bogus aura of romance. The Pied Piper of Hamelin is an example. He was a real man, but there was nothing enchanting about him. Quite the opposite; he was horrible, a psychopath and pederast who, on June 20, 1484, spirited away 130 children in the Saxon village of Hammel and used them in unspeakable ways. Accounts of the aftermath vary. According to some, his victims were never seen again; others told of dismembered little bodies found scattered in the forest underbrush or festooning the branches of trees.

The most imaginative cluster of fables appeared in print the year after the Piper's mass murders, when William Caxton published Sir Thomas Malory's *Le morte d'Arthur*. Later, bowdlerized versions of this great work have obscured the fact that Malory, contemplating medieval morality, seldom wore blinders. He had no illusions about his heroine when he wrote: "There syr Launcelot toke the Fayrest Ladie by the hand, and she was naked as a nedel." Some of his characters may actually have existed. For over a thousand years villagers in remote parts of Wales have called an adultress "a regular Guinevere." But Launcelot du Lac is entirely fictitious, and given the colossal time sprawl of the Middle Ages, it is highly unlikely that Guinevere, if indeed she lived, even shared the same century with Arthur.

WE KNOW LITTLE of the circumstances under which Magellan and his Beatriz were married in 1517, but if they were united by transcendental love, they were an odd couple. It is true that a young archduke in Vienna's imperial court had introduced the diamond ring as a sign of engagement forty years earlier, but its vogue had been confined to the patriciate, and even there it had found little favor. Typically, news of an imminent marriage spread when the pregnancy of the bride-elect began to show. If she had been particularly user-friendly, raising genuine doubts about the child's paternity, those who had enjoyed her favors drew straws. "Virginitv," one historian of the period writes, "had to be protected

by every device of custom, morals, law, religion, paternal authority, pedagogy, and 'point of honor'; yet somehow it managed to get lost."

No one was actually scandalized; the normal, eternal reproductive instincts were merely asserting themselves. But such random matrimony disappointed parents; a girl's wedding was the pivotal event in her life, and its economic implications — the ceremony was among other things a merging of belongings — concerned both families. The tradition of arranged marriages, sensibly conceived, was obviously crumbling. Commentators of the time, believing that the old way was best, were troubled. In his *Colloquia familiaria* (*Colloquies*) Erasmus recommended that youths let fathers choose their brides and trust that love would grow as acquaintance ripened. Even Rabelais agreed in *Le cinquieme et dernier livre*. Couples who kicked over the traces were reproached in *The Schoolmaster* by Roger Ascham, tutor to England's royal family. Ascham bitterly regretted that "our time is so far gone from the old discipline and obedience as now not only young gentlemen but even very young girls dare . . . marry themselves in spite of father, mother, God, good order, and all." At the University of Wittenberg, Martin Luther, dismayed that the son of a faculty colleague had plighted his troth without consulting his father — and that a young judge had found the vow legal — thought the reputation of the institution was being tarnished. He wrote: "Many parents have ordered their sons home . . . saying that we hang wives around their necks. . . . The next Sunday I preached a strong sermon, telling men to follow the common road and manner which had been since the beginning of the world . . . namely, that parents should give their children to each other with prudence and good will, without their own preliminary arrangement."

Females could marry — legally, with or without parental consent — when they reached their twelfth birthday. The age for males was fourteen. Even before she had reached her teens, a girl knew that unless she married before she was twenty-one, society would consider her useless, fit only for the nunnery, or, in England, the spinning wheel (a "spinster"). Hence the yearning of female adolescents for the altar. Getting pregnant was one way to reach it. On Sundays, under watchful parental eyes, girls would