

Medieval Europe I

Europe 400 to 1000 CE

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Introduction

This Premium TimeMaps unit is a sequence of maps which follows the history of Medieval Europe from 400 CE, when the Roman Empire was still more or less intact, and 1000 CE, when it was barely a memory.

The unit's aim is to quickly and clearly show the main episodes in Medieval European history during these centuries. It shows the gradual emergence of the major European realms which divided Europe between them down to the present day, or at least well into the modern period.

Teachers of AP World History, who have a huge amount of ground to cover, may not wish to spend too much time on this period. You can use this TimeMap to skate through Europe's medieval history, picking out points you wish to draw your students' attention to. The bullet points in the Presentation notes below will help you do this.

For those who have the opportunity to go into more depth, the teaching notes provide comprehensive coverage of all the thinking skills, themes and key concepts relevant to this Period 3 topic.

How to use this unit

The unit can be used in two ways:

(1) Whole-class presentation

or

(2) Student-based enquiry work

Teachers may wish to use both approaches, perhaps using (1) as a quick introduction, and then (2) for students to carry out a more in-depth enquiry using the student-based questions; or (if you feel your students can manage this) starting them off with (2), to allow them to find out for themselves what happened at this period, before using (1) as a reinforcement exercise.

How does this unit fit in with other Premium TimeMaps units?

This unit follows on from the Premium Unit **The Roman Empire** for Period 2, and is followed by the Premium Unit on the **Medieval Europe II**, which covers European history up to the end of the Middle Ages.

Section 1: Whole-class presentation

Using a big screen, show the map sequence to your class, talking through each map. To help you do this, we have prepared accompanying Presentation Notes, which are set out below. You can use these either as a script or *aide-memoire*.

This activity can be used as a wrap up / reinforcement exercise, or as a stand-alone unit.

For each map, these notes mostly follow the same formula:

1. Date and introduction

The date to which the map refers, followed by a small introductory paragraph which seeks to encapsulate in a sentence or two what's going on in the map. These are in **bold**.

2. Bullet points

One or more bullet points cover different points of interest in the map, or in the period it covers.

If you are not wanting to spend much time on the topic, these bullet points will be all you need to give your students a clear overview.

3. Additional Notes

The premium map sequence offers a superb framework on which to hang a large amount of information. This more in-depth information is offered in additional notes. If the aim is to give a brief overview of the topic, then skip them.

If you wish to use these Additional Notes, we suggest that, prior to showing the Presentation to your class, you read them through and highlight sections you want to draw on.

These notes cover the vast majority of, if not all, the points referred to in the AP World History course document (these are covered in even more depth in the TimeMaps articles listed at the end of this guidance.)

Some key words or phrases are in **bold**; they are also there to help you see at a glance the key points in a paragraph.

Presentation Notes

If using these in class it might be helpful to print these notes out.

400 CE

At this date, the Roman Empire remains at its full extent (except for a few small areas lost during the Third Century AD) and is still very much a going concern.

- It is mostly **peaceful** and **prosperous** (note 1).
- The empire is divided into two halves, with an emperor for the **east** and one for the **west** (note 2).
- **Christianity** is now the official religion of the empire (note 3).
- There is turmoil within the barbarian world of Central and Eastern Europe, caused by the westward movement of a much-feared people called the **Huns** (note 4).

Additional notes

1. The Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century CE

The Roman empire remains at its full extent, except for a few small areas lost during the Third Century CE. It is still very much a going concern.

It is mostly peaceful and prosperous. There was a major barbarian incursion in the 370s, when a large horde of **Goths** crossed the Danube frontier and annihilated a Roman army at the **battle of Adrianople** (378). They devastated large tracts of territory in the Balkans until they were given their own territory to settle, south of the Danube. Destructive as this was, however, this disaster affected only a small portion of the empire.

The only other part of the empire to experience significant barbarian attack in the past few decades has been the Roman provinces in **Britain**, with major raids from the Irish, Picts and Saxons.

All other areas of the empire have remained free from incursions from beyond the frontiers. The **Persian Empire** in the east, long considered by the Romans as their main enemy, has given little trouble for several decades.

2. The division of the empire

There are currently two Roman emperors. These are Arcadius, who rules the eastern empire from the eastern capital, **Constantinople**, and Honorius, who rules the western empire from his court in **Ravenna**, in northern Italy.

The great city of **Rome** is still universally recognized as the mother city of the empire - but it has not been the seat of an emperor for more than a century.

3. Christianity

For almost a century, since the time of the emperor **Constantine the Great** (reigned 311-37), all but one of the Roman emperors have been **Christians**, and since 380 Christianity has been the official religion of the empire. The Christian church is one of the leading institutions of the empire, and is wealthy and powerful. Most cities have their own bishops, who are their most important citizens of the community; the most senior bishops are those of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria (in Egypt), Antioch (in Syria) and Jerusalem.

Many German tribes also are Christian by this time, though of a branch of Christianity different to that followed by most people within the empire. This is **Arianism**, and it is considered heretical by most Romans as it does not recognize Jesus Christ as being the Son of God.

4. Growing danger

The Gothic invasion of the 370s was caused by turmoil within the barbarian world of Central and Eastern Europe. This is the result of the westward movement of a people whose original home lay on the eastern steppes.

These are the Huns, a nomadic people from central Asia who have struck fear into the hearts of other peoples, barbarian and Roman alike, because of their (to Romans) brutish looks, ferocious ways and alien manners.

500 CE

The situation for the Roman empire has completely changed from a hundred years before, as the western provinces have been overrun by various groups of Germans.

- These **German** groups set up their own kingdoms, and the last emperor of the west was deposed by a barbarian general in 476 (note 1).
- In these barbarian-ruled areas, the old Roman way of life - and the **urban civilization** on which it was based - has declined (note 2).
- Despite the end of Roman rule in the west, **Christianity** remains the dominant religion here (note 3).
- The Roman empire's **eastern** half remains peaceful and prosperous (note 4).

Additional notes

1. The fall of the western Roman empire

In the early fifth century CE the western provinces of the Roman empire were overrun by various groups of **Germans**, who had been driven to cross the Roman frontiers to escape the westward movement of the much-feared Huns.

The major German groups are the **Ostrogoths, Franks, Visigoths, Seubi, and Vandals** (who have by now settled in North Africa). All these have established their own kingdoms.

The Huns meanwhile established themselves as the rulers of a huge confederation of Germanic and other peoples in central Europe. From there they carried out destructive raids on Roman territory. However, their king **Attila's** invasion of Gaul in 451 ended in defeat at the hands of a joint Roman-Gothic army. Soon after this Attila died and the Hun confederation fell apart.

The German kingdoms have gradually extended their territories so that now they cover all of what were the **western provinces** of the Roman empire.

The last emperor of the west, a young man called **Romulus Augustulus**, was deposed in 476 by a barbarian general who had taken control of Italy (though a tiny pocket in the western Balkans is still ruled by a puppet "emperor" ruling by the grace of the eastern Roman emperor, His reign will not last long).

2. The decline of Roman civilization

In the former western provinces, the Roman way of life, centered on the **cities**, has been progressively degraded. **Trade** has shrunk, towns are struggling, and the economic center of gravity is shifting to large, self-sufficient **country estates**.

Some of the old Roman civilization survives, however. The **Latin** language (now evolving into Spanish, French, Italian and so on), Roman **law**, some **administration**, and above all

the **Christian Church**. In the chaos of the barbarian invasions, bishops emerged as the leaders of most towns.

Literacy, and with it the classical learning of the ancient Greeks and Romans, is becoming increasingly restricted to the clergy.

The **Arian** faith of the German rulers keeps them apart from their subjects. They even have different law codes to obey. The major exception to this is the kingdom of the **Franks**, whose ruler, Clovis, has recently converted from paganism to **Catholic** (i.e. Roman), not Arian, Christianity.

Britain

The former Roman provinces in **Britain** (mostly covering today's England) is the exception to the above, as it has fallen into complete **anarchy**. Its towns have been destroyed, and the land divided amongst Germanic (Anglo-Saxon) chieftains and their followers.

Christianity, and with it literacy, has largely vanished from the country.

The German homelands

The tribes who still live in the original Germanic homelands of central Europe remain largely untouched by Roman civilization, with its urban ways, Christian religion and literary culture. The same is true to an even greater degree with the inhabitants of northern Europe (Scandinavia) and central and eastern Europe.

3. The Christian Church in the former western provinces

The great majority of people in the German kingdoms in the former western Roman provinces are descendants of the old Roman populations here. They view themselves as being "**Catholic**", non-Arian, Christians (and therefore harbor a continuing suspicion of their German conquerors, who are Arians).

At this date, "Catholicism" is simply the western version of the term "**Orthodox**" Christian, which is used in the eastern Roman empire to differentiate the majority form of Christianity with variants. Both Catholic and Orthodox view themselves as belonging to a single Christian church. In centuries to come, this will change as Catholic and Orthodox Christians allow growing cultural differences to divide them spiritually, and to turn them into two churches.

Catholic Christians look to their **bishops** as their spiritual - and to a large extent secular - leaders. The leading bishop within western Europe is the **bishop of Rome**. This figure will soon become known throughout western Europe as the **Pope** (*Papa*, or "Father"). Despite his prestige, as yet he has no authority over other bishops.

4. The Eastern Roman Empire

The empire's eastern half remains intact, peaceful and prosperous. The provinces here were **largely untouched** by barbarian invasion, apart from some heavy destruction by the Huns in the Balkans.

Graeco-Roman civilization carries on much as before.

There are stresses, however. The emperors rigidly enforce a version of Christianity which they consider the true one (today it is the version followed by the Orthodox Church). This is alienating populations in provinces like Syria and Egypt - the wealthiest of all, as it happens. Their inhabitants adhered to other versions of the faith. Probably the most widely-followed of these is that practiced by the Nestorian church.

NB: The fall of the western Roman empire is dealt with in more detail in the Premium Unit *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

551 CE

Under the forceful eastern Roman emperor, Justinian, the Roman empire has reconquered its old lands in northern Africa, Italy and southern Spain.

- Ironically, the destructive **reconquests** by this Roman emperor inflict grave damage on what is left of Roman civilization in these regions (note 1).
- A terrible **plague**, one of the worst in the history of the world, has recently spread around the Mediterranean lands from the East (note 2).
- In western Europe, the **Frankish** kingdom has expanded to cover the old Roman provinces of Gaul (note 3).
- In large areas of central Europe the **Slav** tribes have expanded (note 4).

Additional notes

1. The impact of Justinian's reconquest of Italy

Justinian's wars against the Goths have been **catastrophic** for the people of Italy. Many old Roman cities have been left in ruins, and **Rome** itself has suffered grievous damage after a long siege. During this, its famous aqueducts were cut. The once-great city will not recover from this blow.

These wars mark the real end of Roman Italy.

2. Justinian's Plague

This **plague** is one of the worst in world history. The Eastern Roman Empire has been particularly hard hit, with perhaps a third of the population killed. Those parts of western Europe still in contact with the east through maritime trade - i.e Mediterranean ports and their surrounding areas - are also badly affected.

3. The kingdom of the Franks

The **Frankish** kingdom has conquered the Burgundians and confined the Visigoths to Spain.

The Franks are a German group, but their expansion has been aided by the support of the local population of the region (under the leadership of their clergy). This is because the Frankish kings and their followers have converted, not to the Arian faith of other Germans, but to the Catholic faith of their subjects. The Visigoth rulers cling to their Arian form of Christianity for now.

4. The Slavs

The Germanic invasions of western Europe of the fifth century were accompanied by the **migration** of many German peoples from their central European homelands into western Europe.

As a result, large parts of central Europe became comparatively under-populated. This has enabled **Slav** tribes to expand into these areas. This process creates the ethnic make-up of central Europe that still prevails.

630 CE

The Eastern Roman Empire has suffered enormous damage and large territorial losses after full-scale invasions on several fronts.

- The **Persian empire** has invaded the eastern provinces (though they have now been turned back), the **Avars** and **Slavs** have invaded the Balkan provinces, and the **Lombards** have invaded Italy (note 1).
- In western Europe, the map continues to change as some kingdoms expand, others shrink, some form and some vanish (note 2).

Additional notes

1. The Eastern Roman Empire shrinks

The Eastern front

The Eastern Roman Empire's territorial losses started with a major war with the **Persian empire**. In this, the Persians looked at one stage as if they might conquer all the Roman empire's easternmost (and wealthiest) provinces, Syria and Egypt. The situation was only saved by the brilliant generalship of the Roman emperor, Heraclius.

However, immense destruction was caused to the cities of these provinces. Also, with the temporary loss of Egypt (which lasted several years), corn shipments to the imperial capital, **Constantinople**, were halted. As a result, the city experienced a drastic loss of population, from about 500,000 to under a 100,000.

The Balkans

Taking advantage of the empire's preoccupation in the East, the **Avars**, a people from the eastern steppes who had settled in central Europe, led a coalition of **Slavic** tribes in a full-scale attack on Roman territory.

The Roman forces crumbled before the onslaught, and the Avars and their allies reached the gates of Constantinople itself. They were unable to breach the **great walls** of the city, but the Romans have lost control of huge areas of land in the Balkans. These are now being settled by the Slavs. The ancient Roman urban civilization is fast vanishing here as once great cities are reduced to villages.

The stirrup

There is evidence for the use of the **stirrup** in central Europe (the Avar homeland) a long time before the rest of Europe. This has caused some historians to believe that this technology had arrived with the Avars from central Asia, where it had spread to from China.

Some scholars think that the stirrup enabled mounted soldiers to fight much more efficiently on horseback, and so was decisive in the rise of the knight in European warfare and society. Others disagree.

The Byzantines seem soon to have been using stirrups for their mounted troops as well, which suggests that there must have been at least some advantages.

Italy

In **Italy**, a German tribe called the **Lombards** have swept down into the peninsula and occupied much of the Roman territory conquered by Justinian.

2. Western Europe

The Franks

The **Frankish** kingdom has expanded further eastwards deep into what is now Germany, taking in the Bavarians under their overlordship.

The English

In England, the many small **Anglo-Saxon** tribal kingdoms have merged to form several larger ones. The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to **Christianity** is now taking place. It will take some 100 years to complete; this development will bring England back into the family of Christian nations (**Christendom**).

Scotland

In northern Britain, an Irish tribe, called the **Scotti**, has crossed the sea from Ireland to Scotland and formed a small kingdom there.

Spain

In **Spain**, the Visigoths have lost territory to the Byzantines, but they have absorbed the Seuvi into their own kingdom.

813 CE

The Eastern Roman Empire has suffered further disasters, while in the west the Franks have greatly extended their territory under their great king, Charlemagne.

- This time the Eastern Romans, or **Byzantines** as we should now call them, have suffered at the hands of Muslim Arabs, though they have won back territory in the Balkans (note 1).
- Most of **Spain** has come under Muslim control (note 2).
- The **Franks**, under their great king **Charlemagne**, have greatly expanded their realm in western Europe, and Charlemagne has had himself crowned **emperor** in 800 CE (note 3).
- Beyond the borders of Charlemagne's huge realm, changes are affecting different countries; one of these changes is the beginning of **Viking** raids on western Europe (note 4).

Additional notes

1. The Byzantines lose huge territories to the Arabs

The Arab conquests

In the mid-7th century **Arab** tribesmen, fighting under the banner of their new religion, **Islam**, stormed out of their Arabian homeland to conquer huge chunks of the **Eastern Roman Empire** - Syria, Palestine, Egypt and North Africa.

Decline of city life

Within their shrunken territories, the trials of the Eastern Romans have led to radical change. In both the Balkans and Asia Minor (for decades a war zone between Roman and Muslim forces), city life has declined drastically, with fortified villages the main unit of settlement. **Constantinople** is the only sizable city left in the empire, and even this on a much shrunken scale from former times.

Reforms and reconquest

Administratively, the empire is no longer organized along the lines of old Roman provinces; rather it is divided into "**themes**" - essentially army groups permanently stationed in particular areas under the control of military commanders.

These reforms have not only allowed the empire to survive, but have, under a succession of vigorous emperors, enabled the empire to reconquer some of the territory lost to them, especially in the Balkans.

On their new northern borders, however, the Eastern Romans face yet another foe - the **Bulgars**. These are a people who migrated from the steppes of central Asia about 100 years before.

From East Roman to Byzantine

Another change which has occurred during the 7th and 6th centuries is that **Greek** - for centuries the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean - has become the language of government and high culture. Latin is becoming a foreign tongue even to the ruling elite.

To mark these root-and-branch transformations, modern scholars give the label “**Byzantine Empire**” to the Eastern Roman Empire from this period on (to the end, however, the Byzantines would always think of themselves as Romans).

2. The Arabs have crossed over into Spain and occupied most of the country

In 711 a Muslim force crossed the Straits of Gibraltar from North Africa into **Spain**, driving the Christian Visigothic kings into the mountains in the north of the country.

Sometime later the Christian kings were able to grab some territory back. They were helped by a civil war amongst the Spanish Muslims; this led to the establishment of an independent emirate there, free from the control of the caliph in far-away Baghdad.

3. Charlemagne's empire

In the **Frankish** kingdom, a new royal house, known to history as the Carolingians, came to the throne in the early 8th century and established their rule firmly over the Frankish realm.

Under their great king, **Charlemagne** (or Charles the Great), the Franks conquered far into Germany, central Europe, northern Italy and northeastern Spain (modern-day Catalonia).

In 800 CE Charlemagne had the pope crown him **emperor**.

The crowning of Charlemagne as emperor is a source of tension with the Byzantines, who have historically regarded their own ruler as the only true emperor within the Christian world.

Early knights

Charlemagne's wide-ranging campaigns of conquest have favored the rise of mobile troops, made up of mounted soldiers. This may (or may not) have had to do with the spread of the use of the **stirrup** in Europe (see above).

Whatever the case, from this time on mounted, armored warriors begin to dominate the battlefields of Europe. In English, they will come to be known as **knights**.

4. Beyond Charlemagne's empire

In western and northern Europe, apart from most of Spain (see above), only southern Italy, the British Isles and Scandinavia remain beyond Charlemagne's reach.

Southern Italy

In Italy, local **Lombard** dukes and **Byzantines** governors hang on to their territory in the south, but other Italian territories are slipping away from Byzantine control. With Charlemagne's tacit support, the city of **Rome** and the area around it have come under the effective rule of the bishop of Rome (the pope), and at the top of the Adriatic the city-state of **Venice** is asserting its independence from the Byzantines.

England

In **England**, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms have continued to fight one another. As a result, they have consolidated into three major kingdoms, Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex. By this date, the first of the **Viking** (Scandinavian) raids have begun (see below), targeting coastal monasteries.

The Vikings

Perhaps due to a shortage of good farmland, **Scandinavian** warriors have begun taking to their ships and, voyaging along the coasts on the British Isles and northern Europe, they attack **monasteries** and **towns** along sea shores and up river valleys.

The sudden appearance of Viking ships strikes terror into local populations over a wide area.

The Mediterranean

The sea lanes of the **Mediterranean** sea, once so busy, have never recovered to anywhere near the level they saw under the Romans.

Now, the Muslim conquests of the Middle East and North Africa reorientate the surviving trade routes so that those hugging the coasts of Muslim lands become busier, while those carrying **trade** from Muslim to Christian lands decrease still further.

This situation is made worse for Christian traders as the Mediterranean is now infested with **Arab pirates** and raiders, who attack Christian shipping, ports and coastal villages at will. Such is the scale of their depredations that, on the European coasts, villages within reach of the sea tend to relocate to fortified positions on the top of nearby hills, the better to defend themselves from raiders.

The result of these developments is that levels of maritime trade reaching western Europe shrink even more than it has already done. It thus further **weakens urban life**, giving a boost to the shift to a localized, rural economy centered on large, **self-sufficient estates**.

It also cuts the region off from the **civilizing influences** which might otherwise have emanated from the Middle East and the rest of Eurasia.

900 CE

Charlemagne's empire has broken up.

- In its place, **different kingdoms** have emerged, the forebears of modern European nations (note 1).
- Europe has been afflicted by ever larger and fiercer attacks from **Viking** raiders (note 2).
- To the east, the Vikings have extended their control over a vast territory in what is today **Russia** and **Ukraine** (note 3).
- In **central Europe** and the **Balkans**, new states are emerging (also note 3).

Additional notes

1. The break-up of Charlemagne's empire

The large area covered by Charlemagne's empire meant that it would have been difficult to rule even in favorable circumstances, given the poor state of roads and transport in this period. What made matters worse was that the great Frankish ruler, Charlemagne, was succeeded by weaker emperors who could not control quarrelsome and ambitious princes.

Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious, just about kept the empire together, but after him his sons and grandsons fought amongst themselves until the empire had fragmented into several realms. Of these, the realms of the **East Franks** (which would become Germany), the **West Franks** (which would become France) and **Italy** (which would NOT evolve into the later nation of Italy) were the leading kingdoms.

By this date, none of these was ruled by descendants of Charlemagne; instead they were under kings who had either seized power or been elected to their thrones by their fellow-nobles (or a combination of these two).

The struggles between the kings and would-be kings form the headline events of this process; below them, **royal authority** has waned, **nobles** have come to dominate their localities, and **anarchy** has spread through the lands. This was most true in the realm of the West Franks.

Castles and knights

This anarchy throws localities on their own resources. Local lords start to construct wooden forts - **castles** - within which they, their followers and villagers can shelter. The most important of the lords' followers are mounted soldiers - early **knights** - able to hurry to the defense of those under attack.

2. The Vikings

Over the past century or so Europe has been afflicted by ever more frequent and more destructive raids from the Scandinavian raiders called the **Vikings**, or Norse (Northerners).

The Vikings not only harry coastal areas; they can sail long distances inland along even small rivers in their shallow boats. Few places in western Europe are free from the fear of their sudden appearance.

The people of the **British Isles** have suffered particularly badly, and the Norse now control a large swathe of English territory, call the “Danelaw”. The Anglo-Saxons, however, have now started to fight back under the king of Wessex, **Alfred the Great**.

Trade and settlement

The Vikings do not come only as killers, plunderers and slavers. They are also **traders** and **settlers**. In the wake of their voyages they set up trading bases such as **York**, in England, and **Dublin**, in Ireland, which will later grow into important towns.

3. Central, Northern and Eastern Europe

In a huge arc of territory to the north and east of the world of **Christendom**, tribal peoples are forming themselves into organized kingdoms.

Central Europe

On the eastern borders of the Carolingian world a Slav group, the **Moravians**, have established a loose kingdom. They sometimes ally themselves to the Franks, and sometimes to the Byzantines.

To their southeast, the **Bulgars** have expanded their borders dramatically, wresting a large chunk of territory from the **Byzantine empire** as well as pushing their borders far up into the Danubian plain.

Northern Europe

Within Scandinavia, the kingdoms of **Denmark** and **Norway** are now emerging as loosely-organized (and, for the time being, pagan) states.

The struggles that have accompanied this process has probably helped stimulated Viking raids, as defeated Viking chieftains and their followers seek their fortunes overseas. Even once a ruling family has established a kingdom, this does not put an end to Viking raiding - indeed, the raids often become larger and more organized, under the leadership of kings and princes.

Eastern Europe

Scandinavian warriors, traders and colonists have set up a series of trading posts along the great rivers of what is today **Russia** and **Ukraine**. They establish trade routes which connect the Baltic Sea to the Black and the Caspian Seas. There they exchange slaves, wax, honey and furs for the luxury silks and fine wines on offer from Arab and Byzantine merchants.

From these trading centers, the Scandinavians have extended their control over a vast hinterland. The pagan state of **Rus** is emerging, under the rule of the Grand Prince of **Kiev**, the leading trading town of the region. These rulers are descendants of a semi-legendary Viking leader called Rurik.

N.B. - a name change: in Spain, the Christian kingdom of Asturias is now labelled Leon. This reflects a change of capital, from Oviedo to Leon, further south (and hence nearer the frontier with the Muslims, where constant fighting occurs).

962 CE

Western Europe has suffered grievously from raids by Vikings, Magyars and Arabs, and, linked to this, from growing internal anarchy. But the tide is now turning.

- The **Magyars**, a people from the steppes of eastern Europe, have raided far and wide into western Europe, causing great destruction (note 1).
- The king of the East Franks, Otto of Saxony, has eventually defeated them and has had himself crowned emperor (962); he thus establishes the **Holy Roman Empire** (note 2).
- The **Vikings** of Scandinavia have continued their wide-ranging attacks into the 10th century; but by this date the Viking age is drawing to a close (note 3).

Additional notes

1. The Magyars

In the last years of the 9th century, the **Magyars**, a people from the steppes, established themselves in the middle Danube basin.

They were fended off by the Bulgarians, but they destroyed the Moravian kingdom. They then raided far and wide into western Europe, causing great destruction.

2. The Holy Roman Empire

The king of the East Franks, **Otto of Saxony**, eventually defeated them in 955, and then swept south and gained control of the kingdom of Italy.

Otto celebrated by having himself crowned emperor (962). The East Frankish realm was from then on known as "the Empire", or by later historians as the "**Holy Roman Empire**" (to distinguish it from the ancient Roman Empire). This will be central to the map of Europe for the next eight hundred years.

Local rule is in the hands of great nobles, who exercise their authority through subordinate nobles. Though naturally prone to squabbling amongst themselves, the firm rule of Otto and his immediate successors keeps internal strife in check.

3. The Vikings and their impact

The **Vikings** of Scandinavia have continued their wide-ranging attacks into the 10th century.

Within Scandinavia itself, both **Norway**, **Denmark** and **Sweden** have now all consolidated as kingdoms. Of these, Christian kings now rule in Norway and Denmark, but the Swedes cling tenaciously to their traditional paganism.

Normandy

In the north of the kingdom of the West Franks, or France as we will now call it, a group of Vikings have been given a stretch of territory on condition that they owe the king obedience and guard the kingdom from attacks by other Viking groups.

This territory will come to be known as **Normandy**, the "land of the Northmen". Its ruler has the title of count (later duke).

The West Franks

This situation illustrates the fragmentation of royal power that has been going on for some time in France. Local **counts** and **dukes** now control most of France, with the king having very little real authority over his kingdom.

England and its neighbors

In England, the kings of Wessex led the **Anglo-Saxons** to defeat the Vikings and take back the former Anglo-Saxon territories lost to them. In so doing they created the united kingdom of **England** in place of the several Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that had existed before.

In the north of the British Isles, the kingdom of **Scotland** has coalesced around the chieftains of the Scotti, a group which had originally come from Ireland. They have extended their territory to cover most of present-day Scotland, though the far north, the earldom of Orkney, remains in Viking hands.

In **Ireland**, the Viking kingdom of **Dublin** holds sway over the south and east of the country, the rest being divided between squabbling local chiefs.

1000 CE

The Viking age is drawing to a close. The insecurity it has helped to foster in western Europe is giving rise to a new kind of militarized society called feudalism.

- The people's of central and eastern Europe are now being drawn into the Christian family of nations - **Christendom** (note 1).
- The old Frankish world is now a thing of the past; **France** and **Germany** have emerged as distinct entities within Europe (note 2).
- In Italy, **Rome** has become the center of a territory ruled by the pope (note 3).
- **Feudalism** is emerging as the dominant social-political structure in western Europe (note 4).
- By the turn of the millennium, Europe is at last beginning to **recover**, economically and demographically, from the set-backs of the previous centuries (note 5).

Additional notes

1. Central and eastern Europe

On the eastern flank of the **Holy Roman Empire**, both the Bohemians and the Poles have adopted Christianity and are now recognized as belonging to the family of Christian nations ("**Christendom**"). Whilst the **Bohemians** have formed a principality which, though under a native dynasty, has become a dependency of the Empire, the **Polish** king maintains a stout independence.

To the east, the ruler (Grand Prince) of **Rus**, the huge territory in Russia and Ukraine, has also accepted Christianity. Whereas the Bohemians and Poles have joined the **Catholic** Church, under the leadership of the pope, the Russians have been converted into the Byzantine, or **Orthodox**, Church, under the Patriarch (archbishop) of Constantinople.

2. France

In 987 the line of West Frankish kings, the descendants of Charlemagne, finally died out. The magnates of France therefore elected one of their number, **Hugh Capet**, count of Paris, as king.

Hugh's descendants will rule **France** down to the 19th century; this is therefore a defining moment for the emergence of France as a distinct country in Europe.

For now, though, his effective control barely reaches beyond **Paris** and a small area around it.

3. Italy

In central Italy, the **pope** is now recognized as the ruler of an independent principality centered on Rome. The **Papal States** that are thus formed will, like the Holy Roman Empire, be a feature on the map of Europe until the 19th century.

The fact that the pope has become a secular prince as well as a religious leader will cause all sorts of complications in the centuries to come.

In southern Italy, the old **Lombard** duchy has split up into two - the first of a series of divisions. This will soon open the way for foreigners to take control.

In northern Italy, the city-state of **Venice** is growing in prosperity. It is developing its maritime power as it keeps the sea-lanes of the Adriatic Sea open in the teeth of constant attacks from pirates based on the Croatian coast.

4. Feudalism

The troubles of the last century and a half - destructive raids of the **Vikings**, **Magyars** and **Arabs**, together with internal **anarchy** - have caused widespread insecurity for the peoples of western Europe; as a result, much power has devolved downwards from kings to princes, and now to **local lords**.

Castle-lords

These have taken to building **castles** (at this stage, mostly wooden constructions, but soon imposing stone fortresses) for defense: these offer local people shelter from attack.

They also give the local lords a power base from which they can resist the forces of their overlords.

France is the region most affected by this development. With royal authority already weak, and the country fragmented amongst **counties** and **dukedom**s, the spread of castles is seeing power devolve still further, down to the local lords.

Lords and vassals

The castle-lords' superiors therefore seek to bind them in ties of loyalty, called vassalage: a **vassal** promises to follow his overlord into battle and in other matters so long as the overlord protects him and treats him fairly.

A pyramid of such political-military relationships develops, to which many modern scholars have given the label "**feudalism**". It is this hierarchy of relationships that enables medieval rulers to raise their armies: they summon their vassals to join their standards, along with *their* vassals and sub-vassals.

Knights

The lords have retinues of armored soldiers trained to fight on horseback. These also are part of the pyramid of lord-vassal relations, with them promising to serve their immediate superiors faithfully. They have become **knights** which, like castles, are indivisibly associated with the European middle ages.

Local lords have taken to awarding some of their knights with chunks of land as a reward for their service. These estates are called **manors** (which means land "held in the hand").

Serfs

Ever since late Roman times, **peasants** have become increasingly tied to the land they live and work on. This trend has been exacerbated by the centuries of war and insecurity in western Europe, with peasants putting themselves under the protection of lords.

By this period the majority of peasants are semi-free **serfs**, tied to the land and the lord of the manor. He has almost complete control over their lives.

Germany and Italy

Elsewhere in western Europe, some of the same forces are at work. In Germany and Italy the **emperors** have great prestige, but they are distant figures, largely irrelevant to the concerns of most people. It is powerful regional **magnates** and local lords who hold effective authority within their own domains.

5. Recovery

By the end of the 10th century CE, Europe is at last experiencing economic and demographic **recovery**.

Mostly, this is due to the end of the period of invasions and raids, by Vikings, Magyars and Arabs, and the disruptions that these bring. More **stable and peaceful** times have set in.

Technological innovations

The upswing is also due to some important technological innovations. Sometime during these centuries, northern Europeans have developed a **heavy plow** able to turn the wet, heavy clay soils which cover large areas of the region. This has turned hitherto unproductive land into farmed fields.

Linked to this is the arrival of a much more efficient **horse collar** from Asia, which allows horses to use more of their strength in pulling the heavy plows.

Co-operative agriculture

Both these are associated with a change in the way farming is organized in large parts of western Europe. Instead of cultivating their own plots of land, peasants now work much more **co-operatively** on such tasks as clearing, plowing, sowing and harvesting.

This change has been facilitated by the spread of **serfdom**, which has brought peasants more under the control of the lords of the **manors**. The effect has been to allow huge areas of land to be cleared of forest and brought under cultivation.

Expanding trade

All these changes have led to more food being grown, and thus to a **growth in population**. This in turn has resulted in an **increase in trade**. Local trade has expanded as new villages have grown up in what was wilderness, and some favored villages have grown into small towns. Long-distance trade has also expanded, with **Mediterranean** seaborne commerce with the Byzantine empire and even the Middle East taking a marked upward turn.

The main beneficiaries of this are the cities of **northern Italy**, which are located where these Mediterranean sea routes meet the overland routes to northern Europe. Florence,

Pisa, Milan, Genoa, Venice and others are in the early stages of their rise to prosperity, political self-rule and revolutionary cultural advance.

After the Presentation

Here is a quick **Quiz** you might like to use to make sure your students haven't gone to sleep.

The answers are given (*in Italics*).

1. What was the official religion of the Roman empire (*Christianity*)
2. What great city was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire? (*Constantinople*)
3. Which people from central Asia spread fear amongst both Romans and Germans? (*The Huns*)
4. Which figure did the Christian church in western Europe look to for spiritual leadership? (*The Bishop of Rome, or Pope*)
5. Which emperor attempted reconquered North Africa and Italy for the eastern Roman empire (*Justinian*)
6. Which Germanic people occupy the southern half of the island of Britain? (*The Saxons, or Anglo-Saxons*)
7. Which country in western Europe was occupied by Muslim Arabs in the early 8th century CE? (*Spain*)
8. What great Frankish king conquered a large part of western Europe and was crowned emperor in 800 CE? (*Charlemagne*)
9. Which people from northern Europe began raiding the coasts of Britain and other countries at the end of the 8th century (*the Vikings, Norse, Northmen, Scandinavians - all these labels will do*)
10. What is the large state in eastern Europe which has been created by Viking settlers and traders? (*Rus*)
11. What state was founded by Otto, king of the East Franks, in 962 CE? (*The Holy Roman Empire*)
12. What was the label which Europeans used to describe the family of nations which made up Europe? (*Christendom*)
13. The anarchy of the 9th and 10th centuries gave rise to a distinct social-political structure in western Europe - what was this called? (*Feudalism*)

14. Name one of the technological innovations which helped Europe towards economic and demographic recovery in the 10th century. (*Heavy plow, Horse collar - students could also mention co-operative farming, which was not strictly technological but was certainly a change*).

Section 2: Student-based enquiry work

The students can tackle these tasks either as individuals or in small groups. They will obviously need to have access to this Premium TimeMap unit.

They can present their answers in essay form or as presentations.

The questions are designed to stimulate enquiry, thought and discussion. We have offered suggested points that students might cover in their answers. These are given in *italics* just below the questions.

Task 1.

Answer the question, What are the major trends in European history in this period?

Answers should include as many as the below as possible:

- *Invasions and raids from "outside";*
- *The continuing decline of the Roman/Byzantine empire, and with it the decline of the city-based, literacy and learning of Classical times;*
- *An economic shift from urban to rural, and the decline of trade (notwithstanding the development of new trade routes in Russia, the Baltic and the North Sea), the rise of big, self-contained estates, and of serfdom;*
- *The spread of Christendom, and its two main branches; of Catholicism and Orthodoxy;*
- *At the end of the period, the emergence of feudalism, and with it of barons, castles and knights.*

Task 2. Answer the question, Compared to China, India and the Middle East, Western Europe remained backward and poverty-stricken during this period - why was this?

This issue is a matter of debate amongst scholars, and begs a lot of deeper questions of cause and consequence, the most iconic of which is, Why did the Roman empire fall?

However, answers should include as many as the following points as possible (and possibly others as well):

- *The impact of invasions and wars - the Germanic invasions of the 5th century;*
- *the Roman reconquests of North Africa and Italy;*
- *the Avar and Slav occupation of the Balkans in the 7th century, and the Persian wars at the same time;*
- *the Muslim conquests in the Middle East and North Africa of the 7th centuries, which cut off trade and cultural influences from the east;*
- *the Viking and Magyar invasions of the 9th and 10th centuries;*
- *and the civil wars and chaos which accompanied the break-up of Charlemagne's empire.*

All these led to and reinforced a transition from a literate, comparatively sophisticated and urban way of life, in which long-distance commerce played an important part, to a simpler and more rural society, dramatically less literate and learned than before, revolving around large self-contained landed estates.

China, India and the Middle East experienced invasions and internal wars, but not on the scale, nor over such a long time period, as Europe.

Task 3: Different groups of students track the histories of:

- The Roman empire/Byzantine empire
- Italy
- France
- The British Isles
- Germany
- Scandinavia
- Russia
- Central Europe
- Spain

They present their findings to the class.

Task 4. Create a timeline of the key episodes in early Medieval European history.

The episodes I would include would be the ones below; students may select different ones - but they have to be prepared to give reasons.

- *Fall of Roman Empire in the west*
- *Conversion of the Franks to Catholic Christianity*
- *Roman reconquests under Justinian*
- *Invasions of Byzantine empire by Avars and Slavs*
- *Muslim conquests and Arab raiders*
- *Rise of Charlemagne's empire*
- *Break-up of Charlemagne's empire*
- *Viking, Magyar and Arab raids*
- *Foundation of Russia*
- *Drawing of central, eastern and northern Europe into Christendom*
- *The rise of Feudalism*

Then ask the question: What were the two or three most important of these? Give reasons for your choice.

This is quite a difficult one. Personally, I would choose

1. *the Fall of the Roman empire, as this set the stage for all that followed;*
2. *the Muslim conquests, as this led to the shrinkage of European trade in the Mediterranean and the cutting-off of influences from the east;*
3. *the Viking and Magyar raids, as these set European civilization back just when it might have recovered, and stimulated the rise of feudalism.*

Students may choose differently. For example the conversion of the Franks to Christianity rather than Arianism probably opened the way to the unification of the whole of western Europe into one “Christendom”; and the rise and break-up of Charlemagne’s empire certainly had a huge impact.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: TimeMaps articles for further reading

A list of all TimeMaps articles for Period 3 can be found on the Encyclopedia home page. Here is a selected list of the key articles which students should find most helpful:

[The Later Roman Empire](#)

[The Byzantine Empire](#)

[Medieval Europe - Overview](#)

[Medieval Europe - The Church](#)

[Medieval Europe - Economy](#)

[Medieval Europe - Feudalism](#)

[Medieval Europe - Government and warfare](#)

[The Islamic Caliphate](#)

Appendix 2: Using the Medieval Europe I unit with AP World History

Period 3: Regional and Transregional Interactions, c. 600 C.E. to c. 1450

Key Concept 3.1. Expansion and Intensification of Communication and Exchange Networks

I. Transportation and expanding trade

A. Trade routes

- The Mediterranean Sea
- The Northern trade routes pioneered by the Vikings
- Venice

II. The movement of peoples

A. Expansion of trade routes often depended on environmental knowledge and technological adaptations

- The way Scandinavian Vikings used their longships to travel in coastal and open waters as well as in rivers and estuaries

B. Some migrations had a significant environmental impact. Required examples of migration and their environmental impact:

- The migrations from northern Europe into the Roman empire had a huge impact on the human urban-rural environment

C. The impact on languages:

- Latin fragments into Italian, French, Spanish etc

III. Cross-cultural exchanges

A. Disruptions due to Muslim conquests and raids

Key Concept 3.2. Continuity and Innovation of State Forms and Their Interactions

I. Empires collapsed and were reconstituted; in some regions new state forms emerged.

A. Following the collapse of the Roman empire, most reconstituted governments, including the Byzantine Empire and the new German-ruled kingdoms, combined traditional sources of power and legitimacy with innovations better suited to the current circumstances.

- Christianity
- Radical changes to Byzantine empire in 7th and 8th centuries
- Feudalism in western Europe

B. In some places, new forms of governance emerged, including decentralized government (feudalism) in Europe.

II. Interregional contacts and conflicts between states and empires encouraged significant technological and cultural transfers.

- The reverse took place in the Mediterranean Sea region in the 7th and 8th centuries

Key Concept 3.3. Increased Economic Productive Capacity and Its Consequences

I. Innovations stimulated agricultural and industrial production in many regions.

A. Agricultural production increased significantly due to technological innovations.

- The heavy plough
- The horse collar

II. The fate of cities varied greatly, with periods of significant decline, and with periods of increased urbanization buoyed by rising productivity and expanding trade networks.

A. Multiple factors contributed to the declines of urban areas in this period.

- Invasions: Rome, Constantinople
- Disease: Constantinople

B. Multiple factors contributed to urban revival.

- Increased agricultural productivity and subsequent rising population

III. Despite significant continuities in social structures and in methods of production, there were also some important changes in labor management and in the effect of religious conversion on gender relations and family life.

A. Forms of labor organization.

- Serfdom

B. Social structures were shaped largely by class and caste hierarchies.

- Feudalism,
- Landownership

C. New forms of coerced labor appeared, including serfdom in Europe

D. The diffusion of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Neoconfucianism often led to significant changes in gender relations and family structure.