

CHAPTER  
**13**

Summary

CHAPTERS IN BRIEF *European Middle Ages, 500–1200*

**CHAPTER OVERVIEW** German peoples invaded the Roman Empire, causing it to fall. Small Germanic kingdoms arose. The kingdom of Charlemagne finally reunited western Europe but split apart after his death. As different groups invaded Europe, people sought protection and gave up some rights to powerful lords, producing a system called feudalism. The Church proved an important spiritual and political force throughout the Middle Ages.

## 1 Charlemagne Unites Germanic Kingdoms

**KEY IDEA** Many Germanic kingdoms that succeeded the Roman Empire were reunited under Charlemagne's empire.

By the end of the fourth century, invaders from many different Germanic groups overran the Roman Empire in the west. Their arrival and the collapse of Roman rule had several effects. The attacks put a halt to all trade, as it was not safe to move goods from one place to another. The end of Roman government and the decline in trade made cities less important. As cities faded, nobles moved to the countryside. Poorer people followed, hoping to be able to grow their own food. The general level of education in society became lower. As Germanic people settled in different areas, they began to blend Latin with phrases of their own. Their language developed different dialects. Europe no longer had a single language understood by all.

From about A.D. 400 to 600, Europe was the scene of turmoil and chaos as small Germanic kingdoms fought each other for power. Long-held Roman ideas about law were replaced by Germanic ideas of society based on close personal ties. The Catholic Church provided the only sense of order. In 496, Clovis, the king of the Franks, became a Christian with all his warriors. From then on, the pope in Rome supported the military efforts of Clovis.

Clovis was one of many leaders to become Christian. The Church made an effort to bring these people to the religion. It also set up new communities called monasteries, where men called monks and women called nuns lived lives devoted to God. These monasteries became important because their libraries preserved some of the writings of the ancient world.

The Church also grew in importance when Gregory I became pope in 590. He made the pope

the guardian of the spiritual lives of all Christians. He also made the pope an important power in governing part of Italy.

The kingdom of the Franks covered much of modern France. By the 700s, the most important official was the mayor of the palace, even more powerful than the king. He made laws and controlled the army. In 719 Charles Martel became mayor and expanded the lands controlled by the Franks. He also won a battle in 732 against a Muslim force moving north from Spain. That ended the Muslim threat to Europe and made Martel a Christian hero. His son, Pepin, was crowned king.

One of Pepin's sons, Charlemagne, became king of all the land of the Franks in 771. At six feet, four inches tall, Charlemagne towered over most people of his time. With military skill, he expanded his kingdom to make it larger than any known since ancient Rome. By 800, he held most of modern Italy, all of modern France, and parts of modern Spain and Germany. Pope Leo III crowned him emperor. With that, the power of the Church and the German kings joined the heritage of the old Roman Empire.

Charlemagne cut the power of the nobles in his empire and increased his own. He traveled throughout his lands, visiting the people and judging cases. He brought well-read men to his court and sponsored a revival of learning. However, Charlemagne's empire broke into pieces soon after his death.

## 2 Feudalism in Europe

**KEY IDEA** Feudalism, a political and military system of protective alliances and relationships, develops in Europe.

Between 800 and 1000, Europe was threatened by new invasions. Muslims captured Sicily in southern Italy. Magyars struck from the east. From the north came the most feared fighters of all, the Vikings, or Norsemen.

The Vikings came from Scandinavia (now Sweden, Norway, and Denmark). In small, quick raiding parties, they attacked villages and monasteries. They took anything of value. The Vikings struck terror in the hearts of Western Europeans. By around the year 1000, though, the Vikings had adopted Christianity and stopped raiding to become traders and farmers.

The Magyars, Turkish nomads, attacked from the east and reached as far as Italy and western France. The Muslims invaded what are now Spain and Italy from the south. The worst years of the invaders' attacks were from 850 to 950. People in Western Europe suffered and feared for their futures. With no strong central government, they went to local leaders for protection. In this way, Europe's feudal system began.

The feudal system was based on rights and obligations. For example, a local leader, or lord, gave land to person of lower status, called a vassal. In return, the vassal promised to supply soldiers when the lord needed them. The structure of feudal society was like a pyramid. At the top was the king. Next came the most powerful vassals, such as nobles and bishops. Beneath them were knights, mounted horsemen who pledged to defend their lord's land. At the bottom were landless peasants who toiled in the fields.

Peasants were by far the largest group. Many of them were not free to move about as they wished. They were tied to the land of their lord.

The lord's land was called the manor, and manors became the centers of economic life. Lords gave peasants land, a home, and protection from raiders.

The peasants worked the land to grow food, giving part of each year's crop to the lord. They also paid taxes every year and had much of their lives controlled by the lord. Peasants lived in small villages of 15 to 30 families. They found everything they needed in that small community and rarely traveled far from their homes. Their cottages had only one or two rooms with only straw mats for sleeping. They had poor diets. They endured these lives, believing that God had set their place in society.

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## The Age of Chivalry

**KEY IDEA** *The code of chivalry for knights glorified combat and romantic love.*

Nobles were constantly at war with one another. They employed knights, who were soldiers

who fought on horseback. Using the saddle and stirrup to stay firmly in place on the horse, these knights became the most important military weapon of the time in Europe. By about the year 1000, nobles used their armies of mounted knights to fight one another for control of land. When they won battles, they gave some of the new land to their knights. The knights could use the income from this land to support their need for costly weapons, armor, and horses. They devoted much of their time to improving their skill at fighting.

By the 1100s, a new code of conduct for knights had developed. This code of chivalry said that a knight had to fight fiercely for three masters: his lord, God, and his chosen lady. Knights were also required to protect the weak and poor. While the code set high standards, few knights met all of them. For example, most treated peasants harshly.

The sons of nobles and knights began training to become knights at an early age. They gained experience by fighting in staged combats called tournaments. These fights were fierce, but real battles were very bloody and harsh. To protect their lands and homes, nobles built stone castles. When a castle was attacked, defenders poured hot oil or boiling water on people trying to attack.

The literature about knights did not reflect this bloody reality. Poems and stories stressed the code of chivalry, life in the castle, and the knight's loyalty to the woman he loved. Some long poems, called epics, told the story of regal or legendary heroes such as King Arthur and Charlemagne. Songs told the joys and sorrows of romantic love. Many of the writers of these songs traveled to the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine, the rich and powerful ruler of a land in southern France.

The knights' ideals of love and devotion to a noble lady seemed to give women a high position in the society of the Middle Ages. In fact, most women in feudal society had little power. The Church taught that they were inferior. They were limited to working in the home or living in convents. Noblewomen could sometimes rule the land when their husbands were away from home, but they could not inherit land. It usually passed from father to son.

Peasant women had to work in the fields with their husbands and children simply to grow enough food to survive—just as they had always done.

## 4 The Power of the Church

**KEY IDEA** Church leaders and political leaders competed for power and authority.

With the central governments of Europe weak, the Church became the most important force unifying European society. An early pope had said that God had made two areas of influence in the world—religious and political. The pope was in charge of spiritual matters, he said. The emperor and other rulers were in charge of political affairs. Over the years, though, the difference was not so clear. Popes often tried to influence the actions of rulers, who clashed with them in a struggle for power.

The Church was organized into a structure that mirrored society. At the bottom were the priests who led services at local churches. Above them were bishops, who oversaw all the priests in a large area. At the top was the pope, the head of the Church.

The Middle Ages was an Age of Faith, when people were bound together by their belief in God and the teachings of the Church. Though life was hard, the peasants hoped that by obeying God and doing their work they would earn the reward of being saved and being taken into heaven after death. The local church served as both a religious and a social center for the community. Holidays such as Easter and Christmas were especially festive times of the year.

The Church developed a body of law called canon law. It set standards for the conduct of people and officials of the Church. These laws ruled over such matters as marriage and religious practices. They applied to all Christians, from kings to peasants. The Church also set up courts that took charge when people broke these laws.

Two punishments were especially harsh. If the Church excommunicated a person, he or she was banished from the Church. The person was denied the chance for eternal life in heaven. Popes often used this power as a threat to try to force rulers to do what they wanted. When a ruler refused to obey the pope, the Church leader could place his land under interdiction. That meant that no sacraments and religious services of the Church could officially take place in those lands. The ruler's subjects deeply feared this punishment, for without sacraments they were doomed to hell.

Otto I was the strongest ruler of medieval Germany. He set up an alliance with the Church. In 962, the pope crowned him emperor of what became the powerful Holy Roman Empire. It was made up of what are now Germany and Italy.

Eventually, popes and emperors came into conflict. Rulers had, for a long time, enjoyed the power to name the bishops who led the Church in their lands. In 1075, Pope Gregory VII banned this practice. Emperor Henry IV was angry and persuaded his bishops to say that this pope had no real authority. Gregory then excommunicated Henry. When Henry's nobles rebelled against him, he went to the pope and asked for forgiveness. But the larger issue of lay investiture was left open until 1122. Then an agreement stated that only the pope could name bishops. However, the emperor had the right to turn down any appointment that he did not like.

In the late 1100s, a new German ruler—Frederick I—tried to rebuild the power of the Holy Roman Empire. He invaded Italy but was defeated at an important battle in 1176. When he died in 1190, his empire fell to pieces. Later kings tried to revive the empire. However, real power in Germany was held by the German nobles.

## Review

1. **Analyzing Causes and Recognizing Effects** What were the effects of the arrival of the Germans and the fall of the Roman Empire?
2. **Determining Main Ideas** Why was Charlemagne important? Did his achievements last long?
3. **Synthesizing** How did invasions contribute to the beginnings of the feudal system?
4. **Determining Main Ideas** What was the position of women during the Middle Ages?
5. **Forming and Supporting Opinions** How important do you think the Church was in the Middle Ages? Why?