THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

- Between 1000 and 1300, Europe’s population and economy grew significantly. One aspect was the rise of capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system based on private ownership and the investment of resources (money) for profit.
- No longer were governments the sole ownership of wealth.
- Many merchants had become wealthy through trade. They also used their profits to invest in other enterprises. Feudalism was giving way to a new economic and social order.

Advances in Agriculture

- Europe’s economic changes were made possible with an increased food supply.
- A warmer climate which lasted from about 800 to 1200 allowed farmers to cultivate lands in regions once too cold to grow crops.
- Farmers also developed new methods to take advantage of more land.
- Horses were used to plow instead of oxen. A harness for a horse was developed. A team of horses could plow three times as much land in a day than oxen.
- Farmland was also now organized into three fields instead of two. Two fields were planted and the other lay fallow (rested). The three-field system allowed farmers to grow crops on 2/3 of their land each year instead of 1/2. Food production increased. Well fed people could better resist disease so the population grew dramatically.

Medieval Guilds

- A guild was an organization of individuals in the same business or occupation working to improve the economic and social conditions of its members.
- The first guilds were merchant guilds. Merchants banded together to control the number of goods being traded and to keep prices up.
Skilled artisans, glassmakers, winemakers, tailors, and druggists began craft guilds. In most crafts, both husband and wife worked at the family trade. The guilds set standards for quality of work, wages, and working conditions.

By 1000, people were manufacturing goods by hand for local and long distance trade. More and better products were now available to buyers. Because of the wealth they generated, guilds became powerful political and economic forces.

The Commercial Revolution

- The expansion of trade and business was called The Commercial Revolution. Here are some causes and effects of this period:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>EFFECT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased Trade</td>
<td>More workers needed</td>
<td>Serfs move to town; workers paid for labor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased Trade</td>
<td>More cash, banking, and lending services available.</td>
<td>More money available for building businesses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased Trade</td>
<td>Merchants’ wealth and power expand. Lords lose power.</td>
<td>Merchants’ taxes increase the king’s power and wealth.</td>
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The Growth of Cities

- Due to the Agricultural Revolution, the population of Europe rose from 30 million to 42 million between 1000 and 1150.
- People moved from manors and gathered in towns where trade and business took place. Towns sprouted up along ports, crossroads, hilltops, and along rivers.
- Unfortunately, towns had many drawbacks. Streets were narrow. There were no sewers so most people dumped household garbage and human waste into the streets in front of their houses. Most people never bathed and their houses lacked fresh air, light, and clean water. Houses were built of wood with thatched roofs and were constant fire hazards.

The Growing Power of the Merchant Class

- Merchants and craftsmen did not really fit the social order of feudalism. As trade expanded the burghers or merchant class challenged feudal lords who interfered with their trade and business. They organized themselves and demanded privileges. These included freedom from certain taxes and the right to govern the town. They eventually gained these rights from lords.
- Overseas trade sparked by the Crusades led to the development of a wealthy merchant class in the Italian city-states. Unlike nobles, merchants were self-made. They did not inherit their money. They used hard work and brains to make their fortunes. They felt they had the same rights as nobles.
- The German trading towns organized into the Hanseatic League, which protected merchants’ business interests from governments interfering.
The Plague

- Trade routes carried more than goods. They also carried the deadly disease known as the **bubonic plague** or “Black Death”. It got its name from the purplish or blackish spots it produced on the skin.
- During the 1300s an epidemic struck parts of Asia, North Africa, and Europe. Approximately 1/3 of the population of Europe died.
- The plague began in Asia and traveled sea routes. In 1347 a fleet of Genovese merchant ships arrived in Sicily carrying the plague. The disease spread from Italy to Spain, France, Germany, and England.
- Before the plague was over it killed 25 million Europeans and an additional 25 million Asians.

The economic and social effects of the plague:

- The prestige of the Catholic Church suffered as many people prayed but the plague did not end. Priests and members left the Church.
- There was a labor shortage so those left could demand higher wages.
- The manorial systems crumbled as serfs left looking for higher wages. When nobles resisted there were many peasant revolts. Feudalism was severely weakened.
- Jews were blamed for the Plague. They were driven from their homes and often massacred.

Medieval Cultural Achievements

- **Literature**: Although Latin was the official language of scholars, many new stories and writings began to appear in the peoples’ everyday languages. Medieval literature included stories of
knights, feudal lords, and tales of common people. Authors such as Dante and Chaucer wrote stories about warrior heroes and ordinary people who showed courage, humor, and morality.

- **Art and Architecture**: Medieval art was simplistic and focused on glorifying God. At first, architecture was very Roman. Structures were made of stone with thick supporting walls and towers with only small slits in the stone for windows. In the 1100s, the *Gothic* style appeared in Europe. New building seemed to soar upward with flying buttresses and pointed arches. Stone supports stood outside of buildings leaving space for huge stained-glass windows. Cathedrals were massive Gothic churches built to glorify God.