

U3A

**History of Political Power Series**  
**Power in the Mediæval World**

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### **POWER IN THE MEDIÆVAL WORLD**

This course will comment on the power-structures which developed in European society, with some reference to events in other parts of the world, between 400 A.D. and 1500 A.D., focusing on the interaction between changing governmental, economic, technological, intellectual and social pressures, and conflict between incompatible political norms.

Course-notes are available for downloading from the web-site, or can be purchased from the office, and should (hopefully) be read before the commencement of the course.

## READING LIST

- Baumer, C., *The History of Central Asia: the Silk Road*, Volume 2, I.B. Taurus, New York, 2012.
- Bloch, M., *Feudal Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1962.
- Channon, J., & Hudson, R., *The Penguin Atlas of Historical Russia*, Viking, Harmondsworth, 1995
- Davies, N., *Vanished Kingdoms: the History of Half-Forgotten Europe*, Allan Lane, London, 2011.
- Ebrey, P.B., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, University Press, Cambridge, 1996
- Huizinga, J., *The Waning Of the Middle Ages*, Edward Arnold, London, 1924
- Le Goff, J., *Medieval Civilization 400 - 1500*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1990
- Oakley, F., *The Crucial Centuries*, Terra Nova, London, 1979
- Southern, R.W., *The Making of the Middle Ages*, Cresset, London, 1987

**Audio-Book:** MacGregor, N., *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, BBC Radio 4

In addition to the above, the public library system has many other interesting and fascinating titles on the period. General histories on countries around the world frequently have intriguing early chapters on this period. A focus on the History of Central Asia would be informative.

## THE EARLY MEDIÆVAL PERIOD

"The Mediæval Period", and the "Middle Ages" are terms coined during the Renaissance to describe the "Dark Ages" of barbarism, ignorance, and superstition which Renaissance people asserted had come between the fading of the Classical world and their own "enlightened" period, when men once again began to speak and write "proper Latin". This bigoted slur is undeserved, and the period between 500 A.D. and 1500 A.D. was a time of great advances in agriculture, technology, government, philosophy, and economic organization, and was the period in which the Western European identity was formed.

The beginning of this period saw the, largely Christianized, Romano-Celtic inhabitants of Britain and Western France struggling to maintain their political, cultural, and social identity against pagan sea-borne Irish, Anglish, Jutish, and Saxon raiders and invaders: this is the time of Arthur, whether he actually existed or not. In time these intruders became settlers. The Vandals had already settled in North Africa, and the Visigoths had occupied Spain. The Frankish kingdom began to expand from its base in Belgium to eventually encompass most of Roman Gaul: its legal code prevented inheritance of land by a woman (There has recently been some scholarly dispute about this). Despite the military and political dominance of the Germanic Lombards and Goths, Latin Classical culture and society was never fully eclipsed in northern Spain, the south of France and Italy, and politico-social biases and technological treatises and expertise, Roman Law, Platonic philosophy, Aristotelian logic, and Classical literature combined with the teachings of the Church Fathers to provide a continuity of culture for the literate between the Ancient and Mediæval worlds, and many urban centres, although shrunken, survived.

On the other hand, the world-experience of individuals had narrowed to the extent that people often were ignorant of the meanings of particular words and concepts in the ancient writings; to this problem was added the loss of the economic infrastructure which had supported an enormous variety of trades and occupations: there was a great overall loss of practical, as well as theoretical, knowledge. The predominantly Greek-speaking "Roman" Empire with its capital in Constantinople reconquered much of North Africa,

Sicily, and parts of Italy: the Empire was a core of power which linked the economies of the Far East with the economies of the Far West. St. Benedict founded the first monastery under his Rule in 529. The conversion of Ireland to Christianity began about 550, and the Visigoths of Spain abandoned Arianism for orthodox Christianity in 589, while in 596 the re-conversion of Britain (that is, the non-Briton parts, the Anglo-Saxon bits) to Christianity began. Vibrant Christian cultures began to emerge in Ireland and Britain, independent of the Continental Church.

In the East, Plato's Academy was closed in 529, and pagan philosophers began to gather in Persia, where Indian philosophy and Christianity were also tolerated. Nestorian Christians, regarded as heretics in the Empire, began to spread throughout the East. The Church of the East (also known as the Assyrian Church) not quite the same thing as the Nestorians, also began to spread widely. Manichæism was widespread from North Africa and throughout the Middle East. Buddhism from India spread northwards. Mazdæism (so-called, in both its original form and as a debased form of Zoroastrianism) grew in importance. Mithraism was also an important complex of religious beliefs in the Middle East and Central Asia, and may have persisted in the West for some time. Zoroastrianism was another religion with widespread mass appeal. All these religions spread northwards, throughout the multifarious empires which appeared at different times in Central Asia, along the Silk Roads, in Tibet, and into China.

A core of power on which we have not as yet touched existed in Southern Arabia, the source of the incense which was heavily used in both pagan and Christian religious ceremonies. Little is known about this multi-state system, except that it grew rich and powerful through trade between the lands to its east, India, Ceylon, Indonesia, and China, and the lands to its west. Arab communities were scattered throughout the East. In 610 Mohammed began his teaching of Islam, which was a synthesis between Judaism, Christianity (probably the Nestorian teaching), and traditional Arabian cultural values. On his death in 632, the era of Muslim conquest began.

Constant warfare and raiding had wrecked the communications and economies of Western Europe, fragmenting political authority. An impulse towards self-sufficiency

depressed trade. Disease, famine, and war stalked a depopulated countryside. Small towns disappeared; larger urban settlements shrank to a fraction of their former size. Agriculture was disrupted, and the majority of the much-reduced population existed on subsistence level. The civil authority of the cathedral towns was usually in the hands of the elected bishop; in the countryside, gangs of armed thugs fortified themselves in strongholds and levied tribute from the surrounding countryside: their leaders, the local strong-men, were the lords of the land and the founders of aristocratic lineages. Occasionally, the descendants of Roman magnates retained some localized authority.

The social and political basis of the Germanic peoples was the war-band, a group of warriors oath-bound to the service of a noted leader who, in return for their support, undertook to provide for their welfare. As the burden of feeding such groups became increasingly difficult in the impoverished countryside, the "lords" took to providing their followers with grants of land, together with its peasant cultivators, so that they could support themselves. In return, the "knights" swore to support their lord in both peace and war. Likewise, the peasants swore obedience to their lord, the knight, and agreed to provide him with a fixed amount of produce each year, in return for protection from raiders. The Germanic kings were usually elected by the nobles, from the members of a limited number of families, and demanded fealty from their subject-lords. Thus the social and legal bonds of the community gave way to a purely personal tie between man and man, even to the exclusion of kinship bonds. This personal obligation added another degree of social tension to the continuing conflicting obligations of family, community, and selfish interests.

By 800 B.C., Charlemagne had united, and imposed Christianity upon, most of France, and a good deal of northern Italy and northern Europe, and had been crowned "Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire" (an office which was to survive until the nineteenth century), bringing vast areas into Christendom. The breakup of Charlemagne's empire on his death left Europe fragmented, but still Christian. But Arab expansion had removed most of the Middle East, North Africa, Sicily, parts of Italy, and most of Spain from Christian rule by the time they were halted at Tours by Charles Martel in 732, and Western Christendom remained under constant assault by Islam from the south for some considerable time.

Shortly after the death of Charlemagne the Viking incursions began, and Western Christendom was under assault from the north. The Huns were invading from the East. Western Christendom was under attack from all sides, and there appeared to be no relief.

Political power in Western Europe was fragmented, and was largely confined to those areas which a ruler was able to directly control. Military power was fragmented and located in the countryside, where the "lords" dominated their local areas from fortified positions. Social power lay in the personal bonds of fealty. Economic power was minimal, as there was little or no surplus and a small and scattered population: such economic power as existed was in the hands of the lords, who owned the services of the producers.

The unifying ideology of Europe was the Christian faith. From Ireland in the west to the Easternmost possessions of Byzantium, there existed an identifiable unit called Christendom which transcended political boundaries with a network of common religious belief supported in the towns by churches and cathedrals, and in the countryside by the monasteries. Ideological power was the only real power that Western Europe possessed. The political empire of Rome had evolved into a Christian Empire, also headed by Rome.

### **SOCIAL AND MILITARY POWER**

Western Europe in the century after the death of Charlemagne was under attack from all sides. Shortly after 900 the Huns, forced by more powerful tribes behind them, had left their territories to the north of the Black Sea and attacked westwards into Christendom; highly mobile cavalry raiders, they occasionally reached Western France in their quest for booty and prisoners, and split the northern Slavs from the southern Slavs. Population pressure combined with incipient state-formation probably caused the Viking incursions, which began with Danish raids on England around 786 and northern Gaul c. 800, with the Norwegians concentrating their activities on the islands of the north Atlantic and Ireland, while the Swedes traded and raided through Finland and the eastern Baltic region and hence south to Byzantium and the Muslim lands. At about the same time the Muslims occupied the Balearic Islands, Sicily, Malta, Corsica, parts of southern Italy, and Crete: most of Spain had already been occupied, and Islamic pirates and bandits struck deep into France, the Two Burgundies and Christian Italy. Insecurity and fear left an indelible mark

on Western Christendom. The military needs of the period defined the social and economic structure of mediæval society.

Otto the Great, the Holy Roman Emperor, defeated the Hungarians at the Battle of the River Lech in 955 (possibly partly because the main weapon of the Huns was the compound recurved bow: the glue which held these weapons together tended to melt in the damp Western European climate) and the raiders, who had already begun to adopt a more agricultural way of life, settled in Hungary and shortly adopted Christianity. In the years following the Viking attacks on Wessex in 875 and Alfred the Great's ultimate success in the defeat and conversion of their chiefs, other effective resistance to the Vikings was affected in France, which involved the construction of fortified bridges over the Seine and other major rivers and the precursors of the feudal castles. In England, as in the rest of Europe, fortified places were more offensive than defensive measures, used as strongholds from which large bodies of armed men could patrol disputed territories and deny invaders the ability to forage for subsistence. North and north-eastern England had been settled by the Vikings (the Danelaw) before their subjection to English kings and Normandy in France was an area of Viking settlement: both areas were to be of long-term historical importance. Local authorities stamped out the nests of Muslim "bandits" in France.

In Roman times, every free man amongst the Germanic peoples was a warrior as well as a cultivator of the soil, but under the Germanic kingdoms, he soon became more peasant than soldier. At the same time, the technique of warfare was increasingly dependent on the heavily-armed horseman, and substantial wealth was needed to purchase both the necessary equipment and the leisure-time needed to master its use: a horse ate-up considerable resources; weapons-training had to begin in childhood; warfare became a rich man's occupation. Part of the reason for the new importance of cavalry was the introduction of the stirrup (possibly by way of the Hungarians), which gave the cavalryman a better seat and purchase for the wielding of his weapons, and the horse-shoe (also introduced from the East), which was an advantage over rough ground and in long-distance expeditions. Under conditions of subsistence agriculture, the surplus labour



of a large number of people was required to put one such armoured, mounted warrior into the field.

Just as Germanic society had had a focus in the war-band, a group of warriors sworn to the service of a noted "lord", late Roman society had seen the aristocracy, resident on its estates in the countryside, surround itself with private bodies of armed soldiers. The Germanic leaders adapted this practice to both warfare and government by developing the condition of vassalage: the lord was responsible for holding his "vassal", his retainer, to his duty, and for imposing social and legal sanctions on the vassal. A lord attracted competent fighting men, frequently already of high social rank, to his service by gifts of land. The lord was himself in vassalage to a more powerful lord, or directly to the king: the – very personal - tie lasted for life. The vassal held his lands at the dispensation of his lord and, in return, owed service to his lord. The lords of the church functioned in the same way, assigning lands to knightly vassals in return for their service in protecting church property and interests. The mediæval town, as a corporate body, also dispensed lands to its vassals, and received service from them. The gift was not an obligation to *pay* something, it was an obligation to *do* something. Theoretically, the gift was for life only, and could not be inherited, but inheritance soon became customary. The vassal swore "fealty" to his lord in front of witnesses, a necessary proceeding in a largely illiterate society, where some highly visible act, often symbolic, was needed to attest to an exchange or new condition. Complications set in when an individual held "fiefs" from more than one lord, if those lords should come into opposition.

Many theoretically-free men, who were too poor to equip themselves for warfare, descended to a condition of serfdom, while at the same time agricultural slaves and *coloni*, free persons who were enslaved to the estate rather than to an individual, became serfs: there was a great merging of classes. Some serfs were quite well-to-do: an already well-off man could sell himself, his family and their descendants into serfdom in exchange for inheritable property. The serf was the tenant of the estate, and the dependant of the lord of the estate, subject to poll-tax, inheritance tax, rents and other services, and to the lord's permission for marriage. The perceived degradation of the condition of serfdom lay in being subject to the will of another individual, rather than a set of rules.

But not all peasants were serfs: free peasants, or villeins, were not tied to the soil, despite their burdensome obligations to their lord, and were entitled to their lord's protection. Such villeins could be part of infantry forces supporting their knight, as crossbowmen or pikemen or the like. Normandy and the Danelaw were areas where serfdom was rare.

### **THE ECONOMIC BASE**

Roman agricultural techniques, while quite advanced, were adapted to the light soils of the Mediterranean, and were therefore unsuited to the heavy soils of northern Europe. It appears, however, that the general loss of knowledge that accompanied the first 500 years of the mediæval period extended to agriculture and that the 11th century saw a renaissance of Roman techniques in the Mediterranean. Northern European agriculture had to evolve its own systems to deal with the unique problems of soil-type and environment. The leaders in the development of European agriculture were the monasteries that were established in the wildernesses (often by gifts of land and support by local lords), which had the intellectual resources, the ideological power, the organizing ability, and sometimes the capital, to carry out innovative change.

The great oak-forest which covered Europe required massive effort to clear for cultivation, and Europe was short of both manpower and draught animals. Monastic communities, setting-up their domiciles far from other human habitation, set about the task with organized doggedness, utilizing the felled timber for building purposes. Existing communities and groups of runaway serfs achieved subsistence with slash-and-burn agriculture. Warrior-leaders built their fortifications in out-of-the-way places, where defence was the first priority, and then had to initiate land-clearance and agriculture in order to support their establishments. Later, kings and powerful nobles instigated deliberate programmes of colonization. Beaver dams had blocked streams right across the countryside for thousands of years, resulting in silt deposits which formed, when cleared and drained, some of the richest potential farmlands in the world.

The first major breakthrough was the invention of the heavy plough. The iron ploughshare seems to have come from what is now Russia; the wheeled plough came from Germany; the mould-board appears later in Flanders: put together, these

developments resulted by the 8th century in an effective, though expensive, tool for the deep cultivation of heavy soils. The harrow, for covering the seed, was then invented; the scythe slowly replaced the sickle, making harvesting more efficient; crop rotation gradually developed. Oats, rye, and buckwheat gave increased flexibility in crop-choice and more variety in food-sources for domestic animals as well as people: this is the economic basis for mediæval cavalry. Land reclamation from marsh, especially in Flanders, increased the availability of arable land, and in Italy also reduced the incidence of malaria, and changed the settlement patterns. Flemings were in demand as colonists all over Europe because of their skills in land reclamation. Lack of manure remained a consistent problem, partly because of the difficulty in feeding a sufficient number of large animals through the winter. The windmill and the water-mill had been known, but little used, in the labour-rich ancient world; these inventions came into their own in labour-poor western and northern Europe during the Middle Ages. This contrast between the labour-rich Ancient World and the labour-poor Mediæval World goes some way towards explaining the increasing rate of technological progress in Europe during the Mediæval period. By the 12th century, specialization of production in various areas had begun to develop, leading to the expansion of trade.

The Church created wealth through the agricultural efforts of the monasteries in the rural areas, and the establishment of a monastery was usually a focus for the amplification of settlement (peasants came to settle around monasteries) and the expansion of economic activity in the area. The Church created wealth through building programmes in the urban areas, and economic activity was stimulated by the building and presence of cathedrals and churches which required maintenance for their buildings and personnel and sold goods and services.

Industrial techniques developed along with agriculture, driven by military developments and the demand for ever-more efficient armour and weaponry. In the management of metals, a return to old methods, introduced by the Arabs and the central Asian peoples, combined with Roman processes to provide a rich mix of technology: mills replaced much human labour. Glass technology, construction methods, and

architecture achieved great advances, especially when applied to churches and fortifications.

The textile industry achieved major advances in technology, production techniques, and productive organization. High degrees of expertise were achieved by the steady accretion of skills in family craft traditions, and the formal system of apprenticeship and the guild system developed. Quality standards were set and imposed industry-wide throughout each town. The industrial population of the towns was maintained and increased through migration from the countryside as, if a runaway serf could stay at large for a year and a day he was free, and urban residence made such an escape easier: "city air makes a man free". City air also made a man dead: high population densities in urban areas combined with a lack of hygiene to ensure a high mortality rate from disease, and urban populations were only maintained, let alone increased, by migration from the country well into modern times.

The centre of the woollen trade was Flanders, where a shortage of land resulted in much of the growing population taking up weaving, based at first on local wool-production and expanded later, by imported English wool. Failed weavers, unable to maintain guild membership, became an available labour pool which merchants could hire to produce woven goods. Dyers imported their raw materials from all over the known world, and they employed many skilled wage-earners to produce colour-fast cloth. Capitalism began in 10th century Flanders. Capitalism is the purchase of free labour power by the capitalist. This capitalist form of production was at first of very minor economic importance compared with the guild system, but grew slowly and steadily throughout the mediæval period. Trade was conducted by way of the regular periodic fairs.

Risk was an ever-present problem in trade: storms, warfare, and piracy threatened maritime trade; banditry and rapacious tolls threatened the overland trade. Coinage was varied in kind and quality, in short supply, and dangerous to carry about. The Church's religious ban on usury reduced the ability to borrow and lend. The credit system, letters of credit, partnerships, money-changing, insurance, banking, and accountancy were consequences of such difficulties, and the greatest progress in these areas was made by

the Italians, whose merchants learned much from the sophisticated Arabic mercantile system. The production core of Europe was Flanders, with its woollen industry; the financial core of Europe was located in the Italian city-states.

Some monasteries took in peasant boys (girls, of course, were not usually educated) and grounded them in basic literacy and numeracy. The more able students sometimes achieved a university education, a valuable asset even if they did not take a degree. Noblemen and merchants had employment for the literate as “men of business”, and the growth of trade created increasing demand for education.

Population expansion enabled increased food production which enabled increased population growth and productive capacity. The tension between population growth and productive capacity resulted in periodic famines and plagues which created demographic catastrophes. At the end of the mediæval period, the application of science to technical matters began to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The growth of centralized states depends to a large extent on taxation, and the decentralized nature of European culture, combined with the small populations and the chronic shortage of money, made tax-gathering difficult. The Norman conquest of England, which made England effectively the King's property, enabled traditional forms of social and political organization to be overridden to some extent in such matters as law and taxation. The continued ability of English monarchs to wage war on the Continent was a consequence of the most efficient system of taxation in Europe. By the end of the mediæval period, advances in general literacy, combined with the application of the new accounting techniques by “men of business,” University-educated “public servants” employed by monarchies, enabled taxation to be put on a much sounder footing, and helped pave the way for the nation-states of the Renaissance.

### **INDIA AND CHINA**

The history of India during our period is little understood, partly because the peoples of the sub-continent seem to have had little interest in history; very possibly the practice of using perishable writing materials, such as palm leaves, has contributed to the lack of

surviving documents, as has the dominance of the oral tradition for transmitting knowledge. The conquests of Alexander in the north-west (modern Pakistan) left us with some Greek sources for Indian culture, and we have some accounts of India's continuing contact with the Hellenistic cultures of the Near East; we also have some records from the writings of Chinese travellers, plus some inscriptions in local languages. Religious and philosophical texts, whilst very informative for some purposes, tell us little about the state of society or about events and are difficult to date with any accuracy. Some king-lists and annals also give only a limited and local perspective on Indian social, political and economic life, although work is continuing to further illuminate these matters.

Indian languages (probably nearly four hundred of them) belong to two main linguistic groups: Indo-European (Indo-Aryan) and Dravidian. The Indo-European languages of the Indian sub-continent contain many Dravidian loan-words and are one branch of the language-family which includes Latin, Gaelic, Iranian, and the Germanic and Slavic languages, and are mostly spoken north of a line which runs from the south-west to the north-east. The Dravidian languages are spoken south of this line, with some pockets to the north-east. The usual explanation for this state of affairs is that the Indo-European speakers spread into the sub-continent from the north-west in strength during the later Bronze Age, dominating the lower classes at least, and marrying into the upper classes.

In the dominant Hindu religious tradition, the Brahmins were the priests, orally transmitting the religious and social values of a warrior-society of pastoralists to succeeding generations. The texts reveal that the dark-skinned agricultural population was held in contempt by its paler-skinned rulers who, as priests, warriors, or merchants, distained manual labour.

It is not certain at around which period the cast-system became fixed (other societies, at different times attempted to institute a similar system). It was at one time thought that the cast-system was the result of successive waves of invasion from the north-west, but this position is clearly an inadequate explanation. The cast-system operated to fix the social

status of priests, warriors, merchants, artisans, and all the many different classes, sub-classes, and kinds of labourers: it was usually forbidden to change occupations.

At some time shortly after 1,000 B.C., the Iron Age began in India, and iron tools permitted the clearing of jungles and the ploughing of deep soils: the centre of urbanization and state-building shifted to the north-east; monarchy was the dominant form of government. Indian culture and especially the Hindu religion spread widely eastwards, through the Indonesian archipelago and South-East Asia, probably (on linguistic grounds) from a centre in North-Western India. The Buddha appeared on the scene at some time in the late 6<sup>th</sup>–early 5th century B.C., and his successors, by giving religious endorsement to rulers, and prescribing passive acceptance to the ruled, gained vast prestige and patronage, in much the same way as the Christian Church later achieved dominance over the pagans in early mediæval Europe. About 258 BCE Buddhist missionaries began to convert the Singhalese, and also began to spread eastwards, through Indonesia and South-East Asia. Shortly after 400 C.E. (AD) Buddhism began a rapid decline in India, even as it gained strength and prestige elsewhere. Central Asia, China, and Tibet were also to be strongly influenced by the expansion of the Buddhist faith.

The Chinese region, which had been divided into northern and southern political empires, was united in 589 CE (AD) under the Sui Dynasty. Shortly before the Sui ascendancy, the Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian traditions, which had been involved in sectarian disputes which sometimes degenerated to violence, became reconciled to a more tolerant *status quo*. The Sui period saw the establishment of a new socio-political class, the scholars, which were to be a defining feature of Chinese society. Selected by examination, the scholars supplied the intellectual and administrative glue which held Chinese society together: proportionally few scholars were directly employed as government officials – at times around a million scholars applied for 20,000 official jobs – but those lacking official positions were employed as teachers and tutors, legal and religious advisors, and tax gatherers. Occasional attempts were made by new regimes to

eliminate the scholars from the social and political landscape, but the empire proved to be ungovernable without them.

The Tang Dynasty (618 CE) redistributed the land, instituting an “equal-field” system (reminiscent of the archaic Greek revolutionary insistence on a re-distribution of land) proportionately allocating arable land according to the number of family members: before long the usual inequalities manifested themselves. Under the sway of the Song Dynasty (960-1234 CE) gunpowder made its appearance, and an effective naval force was instituted.

Alexander the Great’s establishment of Greek *poleis* from North-West India (Pakistan) through Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia to the borders of modern China led to the establishment of culturally “hybrid” communities which transmitted artistic, technological, and religious ideas throughout the region for hundreds of years. These communities were variously parts of empires stitched-together by diverse “nations” of horse-warriors at different times. These empires, some of which co-existed at some periods, gained economic strength from a high level of agricultural technology and trade along the various “Silk Roads”. Tibet was, at times, a major player in the international politics of the region, expanding and contracting its borders as its power waxed and waned.

The Mongol ascendancy was responsible for a massive two-way transfer of knowledge between the East and Europe and an immense increase in trade, due to the Mongols’ effective policing of the trade-routes. India and Iran, at the intersections of trade-routes, **and this is important**, leapt ahead technologically, as did Japan and Korea on the fringes of the Chinese Empire. Islam followed the trade-routes to Central Asia, India, Indonesia, South-East Asia and China. In Central Asia, Islam tended to be tolerant of Christians, Jews, and the followers of Mithras, Zoroaster, and some other Iranian religions, whilst brutally suppressing Buddhism and some other faiths. Plague also travelled down the trade-routes, decimating populations from the British Isles to China.



The Ming Dynasty (1368 CE) was torn between xenophobia and an economic buoyancy, particularly in South China, which led to increasing overseas trade: Chinese trade linked China with the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Madagascar and East Africa until the xenophobic tendencies won, and overseas ventures (and their Muslim forerunners) were curtailed.

### **IDEOLOGICAL POWER**

The foundations of modern Christianity were laid by St. Augustine of Hippo. Previously, pagan intellectuals had dismissed Christianity as a bundle of illogical superstitions, not worthy of serious consideration. Christians regarded the philosophers, who were trained in reasoned, logical debate, as their greatest enemies: Hypatia, an Alexandrian woman who is regarded by some as the greatest known mathematician to have lived before the eighteenth century, was torn to pieces by a Christian mob incited by Archbishop Cyril in 415. Augustine, who had not had a fully Christian upbringing, had a classical education in Latin, and had thus been taught Stoic values and philosophy; the Neo-Platonists of his day had modified Plato's "Form of the Good", describing it as an indissoluble trinity: the Rational, the Real, and the Spirit (roughly put). Augustine was able, without much difficulty, to assimilate most Stoic values to Christianity and, more doubtfully, the Neo-Platonist *Form of the Good* to the Christian Trinity, thus harnessing philosophy to the service of the Christian Church. Aristotle had proposed that all things possessed a *telos*, an end, or purpose. Now, the Ancients (including Aristotle) believed that History moved in cycles, repeating itself: Augustine proposed a linear view of History, in which History had a beginning, the Creation, and an end, the Second Coming of Christ; the *telos* of History, was the creation of the Christian Commonwealth, the Just (and therefore Christian) State, in preparation for the Final Judgement. Augustine's absorption of Philosophy by Christianity gave Christianity an intellectual respectability it had been lacking, while the respectability of philosophy in Christianity was increased by the later work of Boëthius, who translated Aristotle's works on logic into Latin, laid the foundations for the logic of the Middle Ages, and enhanced the status of Plato's philosophy with the Church. By 500 A.D., Plato was regarded as, in many respects, a forerunner of Christ. The rediscovery of the full range of Aristotle's philosophy, from

Arabic sources, in the thirteenth century, shook the intellectual foundations of Latin Christendom: here was a complete and logically-argued cosmological view which owed nothing to, and was frequently at variance with, Christian doctrine, promulgated by a thinker whose esteem in the eyes of the Church was almost equal to that of Plato. The argument over the acceptance of Aristotle's teaching by Christians sometimes boiled over into violence and book-burning. St. Thomas Aquinas controversially attempted to resolve this difficulty in his *Summa Theologica*, assimilating much of Aristotle's thought to Christianity, and at the same time redefining the Church's position on many matters to accord with current social conditions. On his death, the work of Aquinas was condemned and his works burned, but within fifty years his work was re-instated and he achieved sainthood.

The 11th century saw reforms in the Church instigated by Pope Gregory VII, which standardized the ritual of the Latin Church, forbade vernacular masses, asserted the dominance of the Papacy over secular monarchs, and prohibited attendance at masses by married priests. These measures gave an ideological unity to the whole of Latin Christendom. This unity is reflected in the international use of saints' names, and the perception of a "Christian race", as distinct from Muslims, Jews, and various pagan peoples. Church government, headed by the Pope in Rome and based around the sees of bishops and archbishops, reached to all corners of Latin Christendom. At first, bishops, the effective rulers of urban communities, were elected by their flock, and chosen for their perceived holiness and goodness, resulting in an expectation of, and demand for, moral probity in political leaders which remains a (not always adhered to) part of the European governmental tradition. Partially in response to a plea for help from the beleaguered Byzantine Empire, and partly in an effort to minimize the constant internecine warfare of the Western European military aristocracy, Pope Urban II preached the Crusade in 1095, and instigated a massive expansion of Latin Christendom. The Crusades became, in effect, a colonizing movement which resulted in the Christian occupation of Outremer (the Holy Land), Spain, South Italy, Sicily, and Eastern Europe.

The example of the already-existing monastic orders initiated the fighting orders, the Knights Templar, the Knights of the Hospital, the Teutonic Knights, and many others.

Sworn to chastity, living only to smite the infidel, these international orders played a major part in the colonization process, holding lands in diverse areas. They grew rich, and the economic stimulation of their transfers of funds (from Livonia for an assault on Egypt, for example) was considerable.

The monastic movement had its origins in the East, where holy men of various religions had been accustomed to withdraw from society in order to meditate. Christian hermits, especially in Egypt, took to occupying "cells" in close proximity to each other, effectively forming communities. The life of the hermit came to be regarded in the West as self-indulgent, subject to will, rather than established rules. St. Benedict founded the first monastic order under his Rule in 529. The rules governing the daily round and behaviour of the monks were strict and burdensome. As time went on, those who lived under the Benedictine rule were perceived to have grown lax, and other, reformed, monastic orders were founded: the monastic orders were international organizations which linked vast areas of Christendom with their organizational networks. Still later, the mendicant orders, Franciscans and others, began to carry their missions directly to the people, and often founded their Houses in the towns, where they provided hospitals and transient accommodation for the poor.

The ideological power of Christianity in the Mediæval period, through its assorted networks and the strength of universal belief, has seldom been equalled. At a time when economic, political, social, and military powers were fragmented, the ideological power of the Church gave a common identity to the whole of Latin Christendom. Similarly, the ideological power of Orthodox Christianity gave some unity to the "Eastern" Churches. "Christendom" stretched from Iceland in the west to the easternmost possessions of the Byzantine Empire. Islam, despite schism and faction, gave religious unity to the Muslim world.

### **PATTERNS OF POWER**

The overall picture of the European Mediæval power structure looks, at first sight, to be most confusing. The people themselves categorized society as consisting of "those who

pray, those who fight, and those who work". There were great income disparities in all three categories.

"Those who fight", the knights, were a rural-based aristocracy supported by the work of the peasantry: the knights' military power was founded on heavy cavalry which could fight on foot at need, supported by cross-bowmen and sometimes infantry; but the status of knight soon began to have religious connotations and obligations. The knight went into battle fortified by his religious conviction: the military orders of fighting monks further blurred a distinction that had been denied in practice by those militant bishops who fought at the head of their own knightly vassals. Political power was usually in the possession of this warrior-aristocracy and was thus, unusually in terms of political power around the world, focused in the countryside rather than in the city. There was a vast difference between the income of a poor knight who must support his status, weapons, and horses on the revenue from a small village and its agricultural production, and a powerful baron who could rely on the revenues derived from whole towns and hundreds of villages.

"Those who pray", the churchmen, included the popes, bishops and abbots of monasteries, who were territorial magnates in their own right, with supporting peasants and knightly retainers; the territorial ambitions of the popes were often at odds with their spiritual claims of religious sovereignty over other magnates. Bishops and other high churchmen were usually recruited from the aristocracy, and therefore shared the aristocratic ethos, culture, and lifestyle.

"Those who work" were frequently joined as corporate bodies in large rural settlements, towns and cities which collectively owned the services of peasants and knightly retainers; the more prominent of them sometimes even became ennobled and fought as knights themselves. Commoners were not infrequently warriors (sarjeants, crossbowmen, pikemen, or other foot-soldiers), and the lower ranks of the clergy at least were recruited from commoners who felt a vocation. Commoners, even serfs, could sometimes be quite wealthy, leading to jealousy and friction from the aristocracy.

The universities, which had evolved from the schools of some of the great cathedrals, claimed corporate independence from the network of feudal obligations for their members, and battles both legal and bloody were fought to maintain this independence from both political and religious control: the intellectual power of the Middle Ages was to be found in the universities, and university graduates, as well as being lay clerics, acted as the men of business for the knightly aristocracy, the great churchmen, and the large financial houses. There was a constant tension between the claims of the corporate bodies which made up the mediæval community and the claims of individuals for exemption from service to the corporation. Capitalist entrepreneurs were international in their business interests, and denied any claim on their goods and services by particular corporate bodies aside from their principal place of residence.

Political power was diffused, as the tangled web of personal allegiances often overrode territorial loyalties, and a king's power could only be measured by the number of lords whose loyal fealty he could command. The Black Douglas was a Scots lord who owed fealty to the King of Scotland, but he also owed fealty to the King of England for lands which he held in England and fealty to the King of France for lands which he held in France. The King of England owed fealty to the King of France for some of his French possessions. The elective kingships of such territories as Germany [which was said to at times include "as many princely states as there were days in the year"] were a destabilizing factor in the long-term political life of those areas. England, "owned" by the monarchy by right of conquest, was one of the more stable political units. But a political system where a given individual frequently owed services and obligations to a number of lords whose interests were often in conflict inherently led to instability and often broke down.

Social power belonged to the great families, who supplied the aristocracy and the church with their leaders. Rarely could a commoner achieve distinction, even through the church, and upward social mobility usually took several generations. The purely local power of wealthy merchants and financiers was often overridden by the near-universal distrust of businessmen and distaste for "trade" in what was still predominantly a "use"

economy. Even so, impoverished students, who rarely succeeded in taking a degree, were able to find employment with the minor aristocracy and the smaller merchant houses, thus improving their social position, and there were some other avenues for upward social mobility, such as capturing a horse and armour in battle, and thus becoming a knight; becoming a free settler in one of the new communities; or through success in business. There was more social fluidity in England, where the younger offspring of the minor nobility sometimes intermarried with the yeoman farmers and with merchant families: between aristocrat and commoner, England had a class of "gentry", a factor which facilitated both upward and downward social mobility.

Economic power was vested in the great merchant families of the towns, especially significant in the city-states of Northern Italy or London in England. The prevailing notion of affluence was the possession of a horde of precious metals and stones, a notion that tended against the circulation of wealth. Monarchs, despite their powers of taxation, were forced to redistribute much of their incomes as gifts to ensure the loyalty of powerful retainers and to finance wars, and so were often forced to borrow at exorbitant rates of interest. The English taxation system was, however, quite efficient, and the rulers of other countries had begun to improve the efficiency, size, and scope of their revenues by the late middle ages: the effectiveness of revenue raising was enhanced by the adoption of techniques of accounting, bookkeeping, and banking originally developed in the commercially-oriented city-states of Italy, which had, in turn, learned them from the Arabs. Economic activity steadily increased throughout most of the mediæval period, as various regions exchanged their specialized products, and capital accumulation paved the way for the economic expansion of the Renaissance. Control over agricultural land remained a massive source of economic power for the aristocracy.

The basis of military power also changed between the 11th and 15th centuries, as the knightly heavy cavalry was increasingly disadvantaged by disciplined companies of crossbowmen, despite their low rate of fire; the late Mediæval period saw heavily-armoured knights consistently defeated by the introduction of the English long-bow and the Swiss pike, both wielded by highly-disciplined units of commoners. The fortifications of the great lords could not stand assault by cannon-fire, operated by trained groups of

commoners. The vulnerability of castles to the new military techniques, which (normally) only monarchs could afford, enabled monarchs to impose greater control and discipline over their nobles, leading to the beginnings of the European nation-states. The warrior-aristocracy, whilst retaining its political power and much of its economic power as great agricultural landowners, became an officer-class rather than the army itself.

Latin Christendom was unified by the ideological power of the Roman form of Christianity. Although the Church, led by the Popes, maintained control over this ideological power throughout the period, there were frequent challenges from the commonality. Bitter protests against abuses by the priesthood, the luxurious lives of great churchmen, often embodying disputes over points of dogma, resulted in "heresies" of various kinds, particularly in rural areas, which were put down with great cruelty. As "heresies" multiplied, the Inquisition was instituted to examine claims of heretical teaching or opinion. The Church, supported by its control over literacy and by the military force of the aristocracy, was able to maintain its dominance over Christian ideology.

On the world scale, there were a number of cores of economic power. Byzantium was immensely rich, drawing resources from production within the borders of its territory, and resources by trade from Scandinavia in the north, Latin Christendom to the west, the Islamic lands, and through them the lands with which *they* traded. The economic core of Islam lay in Cairo, which drew its resources from production in Egypt and the Middle East and through trade from Christendom, Africa as far south as Mozambique, India, Indonesia, and China. The European multi-state system generated increasing economic growth from an underdeveloped productive capacity and traded with Byzantium and the Islamic lands and, through them, obtained trade-goods from as far afield as China. The Indian sub-continent was a dynamic multi-state system with enormous productive capacity from its own resources which drew further resources by trade with China, Indonesia, Central Asia, the Middle East, East Africa, and Europe; it had economic cores in the north-west, the north-east, the south, and Sri Lanka. Central Asia was an unstable, often multi-state, system based on agricultural and pastoral production, mining and metallurgy, trade, and the military power of its horse-warriors. The Chinese region, in

this period the most technologically and economically advanced part of the world, possessed of a vast resource-base and an immense productive capacity, oscillated between strong unified rule, weak unified rule, and fissioning into warring regional areas: the state (whether regional or extensive) was characterized by the centralized control of a pervasive bureaucracy led by an intellectual élite. Added to the usual internal power-sources common to the rest of the world, the military, the religious establishments, the commercial sector, and the aristocracy, China, uniquely, had generated another: the scholars. Dating their influence from the bureaucratic societies of the Bronze Age, the authority of the scholars had been legitimated by the teachings of Confucius and subsequent thinkers: staffing the political society's bureaucracies and advising rulers on matters of policy and morality, the scholars were indispensable to the rule of Emperors whether domestic or foreign, and were a major source of cultural continuity, cultural unity, and social power until the late 19th century. China's economic cores lay in the metals-rich north and the manufacturing-and-mercantile south which, in the periodic absence of unified rule became a dynamic multi-state system. The Chinese Empire, rich in economic resources, exported to all the other regions. Europe, Byzantium, the Middle East, Central Asia, India and China were the core areas of a world economic system by the end of the European Mediæval period, and generated entrepôt states on their peripheries which manifested, grew powerful, and weakened or disappeared with long-term fluctuations in international trade: these included Russia, and a number of centres in the African and south-east Asian regions. Technologies were rapidly disseminated between the core areas, and economic and technological development was more-or-less even, with China being the most powerful region and Europe the weakest. The ensuing modern period was to witness the rise to world dominance of the European multi-state system, driven by its manpower-poverty to devise new, efficient means of mass-production and supply.