CHAPTER 15 - EUROPE TO THE EARLY 1500s:
REVIVAL, DECLINE, AND RENAISSANCE

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter recounts the rise of the German empire, the increasing power of the papacy which led to a crisis between Church and State and their separation, the early crusades, the growth of universities and towns, the society of the High Middle Ages, and political development in England, France, the Holy Roman Empire and medieval Russia. It also assesses the political, social and economic decline of the fourteenth century and renewal in the fifteenth century. Topics include the Hundred Years' War, the Black Death, relations between Church and State, development of England, Spain and France into centralized nation-states, as well as the history of Germany and Italy. The treatment of Italy includes the renaissance of classical learning and the growth of Humanism.

In 918, Henry I became the first non-Frankish king of Germany. Otto I succeeded in 936, invaded Italy and proclaimed himself king. Otto controlled the church and enlisted it as a part of his rebuilding program, making bishops and giving them land. Otto's successors, however, were so preoccupied with affairs in Italy that their German base began to deteriorate and the church soon became more independent.

A reform movement within the church started at Cluny, a monastery in France. The Cluny reforms were intent on creating a spiritual church and rejected the subservience of the clergy to royal authority. The movement grew to embrace almost fifteen hundred cloisters, and popes devoted to Cluny's reforms came to power during the reign of Henry IV (1056-1106). Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) prohibited lay investiture of the clergy and ruled that only popes could install bishops. This declaration was a direct threat to Henry's authority over his realm and his protests led to his excommunication by Gregory. After Henry's subservience in the snow at the papal retreat at Canossa in 1077, he regrouped his forces and forced Gregory into exile where he died. The investiture controversy was finally settled in 1122 with the Concordat at Worms, which amounted to a compromise. The real winners in this struggle between Church and State were the local princes.

The early crusades provide an index of popular piety and support for the pope. The First Crusade, proclaimed by Pope Urban II in 1095, captured Jerusalem in 1099 but failed to maintain the territory in the face of rising Arab strength. The Second Crusade also failed to secure the area as did the Third Crusade which saw the divisive effect of the competing monarchs of Europe.
Politically and religiously these first crusades were a failure, but they were important in stimulating trade between east and west. The Fourth Crusade, in fact, revealed the interdependence of religion and business.

The western commercial revival resulting from the crusades repopulated old cities and gave birth to new industries. Traders themselves formed a new distinctive social class. They came not from landed nobility, but from poor adventurers. The new rich broke into the aristocracy, and towns became a major force in the breakup of medieval society. Generally, towns and kings allied against the great feudal lords (England was the exception), and as kings were able to hire mercenary soldiers the noble cavalry became militarily obsolete. As towns and industries attracted serfs from the farms, the nobility gradually lost its once all-powerful economic base.

A renaissance of ancient knowledge in the twelfth century (thanks to Spanish Muslim scholars) contributed to the rise of universities. At first the university was no more than a group of individuals united by common self-interest and for mutual protection. The university was simply a program of study that gave the student license to teach others. The most important universities specialized in particular disciplines such as law or theology and were located at Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge and Heidelberg.

Four basic social groups were distinguished in the Middle Ages: nobility, clergy, peasantry and townsfolk. Noblemen lived off the labor of others; war was their sole occupation and in peacetime they liked hunting and tournaments. Noblemen formed a broad social spectrum, from minor vassals to mighty barons. After the fourteenth century, several factors (population losses, changes in military tactics and the alliance of wealthy towns with the king) forced the landed nobility into a steep economic and political decline.

There were two basic types of clergy: the regular (monks and nuns who lived in cloisters) and the secular (those who worked directly among the laity), who formed a vast hierarchy. Due to the popular reverence for its role as mediator between God and man, the clergy obtained special immunities which townsfolk came to resent. After the fifteenth century, governments subjected them to the basic responsibilities of citizenship.

The largest and lowest social group was the agrarian peasantry. There were both servile and free manors. Two basic changes occurred in the evolution of the manor: 1) as the lords parcelled out their land to new tenants, manors became hopelessly fragmented and family farms replaced manorial units; 2) the revival of trade and towns made possible the translation of feudal dues into money payments, giving tenants greater freedom. When a declining nobility tried to
increase taxes and restrict migration into the city, armed revolts broke out which, although brutally crushed, stand as testimony to the breakup of medieval society.

By modern comparison most medieval towns were but small villages. In the eleventh century the term bourgeois first appeared to designate the new merchant groups which formed communities in old Roman towns. These men were suspect within traditional medieval society and advocated a strong central government which would eliminate arbitrary tolls and tariffs that hampered trade. The resulting conflict with the landed nobility led towns to form independent communes and ally with kings.

This chapter also includes a section on medieval women and children. The authors emphasize that the image of women as either subjugated housewives or confined nuns is misleading. Actually, the majority of medieval women were neither. On the one hand, women were dominated by males in almost every aspect of life and were expected to be obedient to husbands whose duty it was to protect and discipline them. On the other hand, women were protected in Germanic law and defended by the church as spiritual equals to males. The vast majority of women were respected and loved by their husbands perhaps because they worked so closely with them in various occupations. Women played a prominent and creative role in workaday medieval society.

The chapter continues with political developments in England, emphasizing the invasion by William the Conqueror and his establishment of a strong monarchy. Henry II founded the Plantagenet dynasty. Henry's wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, helped shape court culture and literature in France and England and bore Henry the future kings, Richard the Lion-Hearted and John I. Discontent increased among the English because of high taxation in support of unnecessary foreign crusades by Richard and John. The last straw was the defeat by the French at Bouvines in 1214, which led to a revolt by the English barons and finally the Magna Carta in 1215. This monumental document secured the legitimate powers of the monarchy. The French faced the reverse problem. Feudal princes dominated France from the beginning of the Capetian dynasty (987) until Philip II Augustus (1180-1223). Louis IX (1226-1270) embodied the medieval view of the perfect ruler. His accomplishments in maintaining a unified kingdom, abolishing serfdom, improving the judicial system and establishing a more equitable tax system were widely admired. English expansion stirred France to unity.

Meanwhile the Hohenstaufen dynasty in Germany was unable to establish a stable government. The text details the efforts of Frederick I Barbarossa, Henry VI and Frederick II in their attempts to gain control of Italy and the predictable clash with the papacy which ensued.
Frederick II neglected affairs in Germany to such an extent that when he died in 1250, the German monarchy died with him.

Early in the ninth century, Russia was converted to Christianity by Byzantine missionaries. The cultural center of this developing civilization was Kiev which held this position (and defended it against the Mongols) until the mid-fourteenth century when Moscow under Ivan I rose as an important power. In 1380, the Mongols were finally defeated in battle and driven out of Russia within the next century.

The underlying causes of the Hundred Years' War included English possession of French lands along the coast: French support of the Bruces of Scotland (who were fighting to end English overlordship of Scotland), a quarrel over Flanders and the strong hereditary claim of King Edward III of England to the French throne. The war lasted from 1337-1453, with 68 years of at least nominal peace and 44 of active fighting. France had a much larger population and was wealthier than England, but received poor leadership from their kings and, unlike England, the country was internally divided. After early English victories, French national sentiment was spurred to unprecedented heights by Joan of Arc, and a unified France progressively forced the English back. By 1453, the English held only their coastal enclave in Calais.

The bubonic plague known as the "Black Death" hit a Europe in 1347 which had been weakened by decades of overpopulation, economic depression, famine and bad health. Raging from 1347-1350, it killed as much as 2/5 of the population of western Europe. As a result of the plague, agricultural prices fell while the cost of manufactured goods rose. Noble landowners suffered as per capita income in the cities increased. Trade guilds became powerful and monarchs were able to continue the process of governmental centralization.

In the thirteenth century, the church was being undermined by internal religious disunity and by the denial of imperial power, for the papacy was now on the defensive against its old anti-imperial allies. Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) tried to maintain the papal monarchy of the early thirteenth century, but a French army sent by King Philip IV surprised the pope; Boniface was beaten up and almost killed. There was no lasting papal retaliation. Pope Clement V (1305-1314) moved his permanent residence to Avignon (called the "Babylonian Captivity") and the papacy remained subservient to the French king from 1309 to 1377. From 1378 to 1417, there occurred the Great Schism in the church which saw rival popes and division of support among secular leaders. With the papacy in such chaos, there followed an attempt at conciliar government for the church. The chapter then details this movement and focuses in particular on the Councils of Constance (1414-1417) and Basil (1431-1449). By mid-century, the papacy had recovered adequately to assume a controlling role in church councils.
Renaissance society took distinctive shape within the cities of Italy. There were five major states: Milan, Florence, Venice, the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples. These states had various types of government, but most evolved into despotisms after near-anarchic social conflict. All of them possessed great wealth, the main requirement for patronage of the arts and letters.

Humanism was the scholarly study of the Greek and Latin classics and the ancient Church Fathers, both for their own sake and in hope of a rebirth of ancient values. Humanists believed that much of traditional education was useless: education should promote individual virtue and public service. The chapter then details intellectual development such as the neo-Platonism of Ficino and the famous oration of Pico della Mirandola. The art of the period is also discussed with special emphasis on the realism of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo and Giotto.

The internal cooperation of Italy's city-states, which had been maintained during the fifteenth century, broke down in 1490. Threatened by attack from Naples, Florence and the Papal States, the Milanese despot Ludovico asked for French help. A series of three French invasions ensued which resulted in Spanish intervention as well. Italy was left a shambles. Machiavelli became convinced that Italian political unity and independence were ends worth any means. He wrote The Prince in 1513 to encourage the emergence of a strong ruler from the Medici family. Italy, however, remained divided.

Because of the Hundred Years' War and the Schism in the church, the nobility and the clergy were in a decline in the Late Middle Ages. The bonds of feudal society were finally broken and sovereign states arose. Monarchies began to create bureaucracies which administered the realm and collected taxes which were increased to support the new standing armies. The chapter then details the rise of France under Louis XI, the unification of Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella, the conflict in England with the "War of the Roses," and the establishment of the Tudor monarchy in 1485 under Henry VII. In Germany, an agreement known as the Golden Bull established a seven-member electoral college in 1356 which also functioned as a transregional administrative body. But Germany remained the most disunited of late medieval countries.

**KEY POINTS AND VITAL CONCEPTS**

1. **The Investiture Controversy:** This controversy involved the selection of bishops and their installation or investiture with the ring and staff which symbolized their office.
Traditionally the emperor had done this as a way of assuring the loyalty of his administrators. Pope Gregory VII, inspired by the reforms of Cluny, saw this as an encroachment on papal power. The struggle between Church and State which ensued can also be viewed as stemming from earlier papal assertions of primacy over Caesaropapism. The controversy resulted in a compromise, but in the long run the royal and papal agendas were too competitive for peaceful coexistence. The most bitter clash between Church and State was still to come.

2. **The Crusades**: The religious and political failure of the Crusades should be stressed with special attention to the Fourth Crusade which saw the sack of Constantinople by the "faithful." In truth, this crusade reveals the interdependence of religion and business; the crusades were important in stimulating new industries, the growth of towns and trade between east and west.

3. **Scholasticism**: Logic and dialectic, however, soon became more important than the other arts, and formed the basis of Scholastic study. Some scholars, notably John of Salisbury and Bernard of Clairvaux, rejected Scholasticism as heartless and presumptuous. They believed that grammar and eloquence were more useful for the church. The Scholastic emphasis upon logic and dialectic and the contribution of arguments pro and con on particular issues was not only controversial at the time, but would be attacked in the future by humanists who put little stock in the "mindless exercises" of the Scholastics and longed to enlarge the boundaries of learning.

4. **Church and State**: In this chapter, the clash between Church and State is of central importance in the Plantagenet and Hohenstaufen relations with the papacy. For the most part, the church showed great resiliency in the face of determined opposition from Henry II and Frederick II. Pope Innocent III (1198-1215) made the papacy a great secular power and must stand as one of the most capable leaders of the medieval church. During his reign, the papacy became the efficient ecclesio-commercial complex that was later attacked by reformers. He used the crusade to suppress dissent, especially against the Albigensians. Under Innocent's direction, the Fourth Lateran Council met in 1215 to establish hierarchical church discipline from pope to parish. Innocent also gave sanction to both the Franciscan and Dominican orders which served to answer lay criticism of the worldliness of the papal monarchy.
5. **The Rise of Towns**: This theme, presented in the last chapter, is further articulated. Feudal society during the High Middle Ages showed signs of collapsing as more serfs left the land for the lure of the city; Louis IX, in fact, abolished serfdom in France. England and France were moving toward centralized monarchies and the transformation from a feudal society to a nation-state more dependent on the wealth and products of its cities had begun. The major exception to this political transformation is Germany which, thanks in large measure to the disastrous reign of Frederick II, remained a bastion of decentralized local rule.

6. **The Black Death**: One of the great determinants of change in history is disease. The social and economic results of the plague were wide-ranging and included fluctuation of agricultural prices and city income, as well as a decline in trade and the quality of goods produced. Politically, it is important to note that the powers of the two great containers of monarchy in the Middle Ages, the church and the nobility, suffered greatly in numbers and prestige from the effects of the plague. Monarchs were able to progress toward the centralization of their governments and economies.

7. **The Emergence of Nation-States**: The unified states such as France, Spain and England which were emerging in the 14th and 15th centuries had various things in common which are ingredients of the modern state: a centralized bureaucracy of civil servants dependent upon the king for their positions and thus generally loyal (contrast this with clerical administrators upon which earlier kings often had to depend); standing armies (instead of feudal levies); and increased taxation of the peasantry to support these requirements. In addition, major benefits of a centralized state include a postal service and expanded trade and industry. Italy and Germany were the two most important examples of areas which failed to unify due to intense local rivalries.

8. **Relations Between Church and State**: The late 13th and 14th centuries were a period of chaos for the church. The victim of attacks by local political factions, the papacy lost respect because of its transfer to Avignon, the Schism which followed, the impact of the Conciliar Movement, the corruption of Alexander VI and others, and the French involvement in Italy. In the long run, the sword of the secular arm proved more than a match for the medieval church.
9. **The Renaissance**: Renaissance is a French term meaning "rebirth" which describes the dawning of a new era which took its inspiration from classical antiquity. The revival of learning and emphasis upon man and his unique abilities and beauty contrasts with the medieval emphasis upon the glory of God and the sinfulness of man. The "rebirth" of Western Civilization implies that the Middle Ages were years of decline and sterility. Although true in some ways, medieval civilization can certainly be viewed as progressive and even exceptional in the establishment of trade routes, commerce and technology. The Late Middle Ages was a period of "creative breakup".

10. **The High Middle Ages in World Perspective**: During the High Middle Ages, Western Europe concentrated on cultural development and the formation of its political institutions. Everywhere, society successfully organized itself from noble to serf. This was a period of clearer self-definition for the West. Other world civilizations were beginning to depart from their "classical" or "golden" periods. The best lay behind rather than before them. Still, the Chinese invented printing, the abacus and gunpowder. Politically, the Sung dynasty was autocratic, yet by the fourteenth century, as in the West, a higher degree of freedom and self-government developed in the countryside among the peasantry. Religiously, Confucianism remained a philosophy highly adaptable to lay people while Western scholasticism made Christianity aloof, elitist and often ridiculed by the laity. In the late twelfth century, Japan shifted from a civilian to military rule; this marked the beginning of Japan's medieval period. More like Western Europe than China, Japanese women traditionally played a prominent role in royal government and court culture. By the tenth century, Islam had created an international culture and came into greater contact with the West through crusades starting in the late eleventh century. Islam, too, was on the march as it penetrated Turkey, Afghanistan and India, where it encountered a new enemy in Hinduism.

**SUGGESTED FILMS**

*The Year 1200.* BFA Educational Media. 19 min.

*The Crusades.* Centron. 16 min.
The Crusades: Saints and Sinners. Lutheran Church of America. 26 min.

Civilisation: 2 - The Great Thaw. Time-Life. 52 min.


Medieval Guilds. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 21 min.

The Medieval Manor. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 22 min.

Medieval Knights. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 22 min.

The Medieval Mind. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 26 min.

Medieval Crusades. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 27 min.

The Middle Ages. International Film Bureau. 31 min.


Medieval Times: Role of the Church. Coronet. 14 min.

Art and Architecture: Lesson II. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 30 min.

Chartres Cathedral. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 30 min.

Art of the Middle Ages. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 30 min.

Romanesque Painters (1000-1200). Roland Films. 11 min.

Magna Carta. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 34 min.

Becket. Teaching Film Custodians. 32 min.

Chaucer and the Medieval Period. Coronet. 14 min.

Chaucer's England. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 29 min.

Civilization 3: Romance and Reality. Time-Life. 52 min.

Medieval England: the Peasants' Revolt. Learning Corporation of America. 31 min.

Dijon - the Four Grand Dukes of Burgundy (1300-1500). Roland Films. 15 min.

Joan of Arc - A Profile in Power. Learning Corporation of America. 25 min.

You Are There: The Final Hours of Joan of Arc. McGraw-Hill. 26 min.

Civilization IV: Man - Measure of All Things. McGraw-Hill. 52 min.

Civilization V: The Hero as Artist. Time-Life. 52 min.

The Spirit of the Renaissance. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 31 min.

The Renaissance: Its Beginnings in Italy. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 26 min.


Raphael. Time-Life. 20 min.

Michelangelo. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 32 min.
Michelangelo and His Art. Coronet. 16 min.

The Secret of Michelangelo: Every Man's Dream. Association of Instructional Materials 51 min.


Botticelli (1444-1510). Time-Life. 10 min.

El Greco. Graphic Curriculum. 28 min.

1492. McGraw-Hill. 54 min.

Venice: The Great Renaissance Merchant State. Benchmark Films. 20