

**SSWH7: ANALYZE EUROPEAN  
MEDIEVAL SOCIETY WITH  
REGARD TO CULTURE,  
POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND  
ECONOMICS**



*Element C: Describe how increasing trade led to the growth of towns and cities,  
include: the impact of the Bubonic Plague.*

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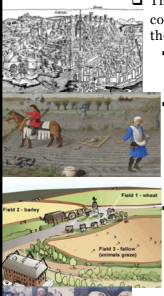
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**COMMERCIAL REVOLUTION**

- ❑ The increase in trade and urbanization of Europe was precipitated by population growth that began around 800 CE.
- ❑ This population growth was the product of the convergence of climatic conditions and technological innovations which led to an increase in the food supply.
  - From about 800 to 1200 CE Europe experienced a warm spell that allowed a fairly dramatic increase in land available for cultivation and an extension of the growing season.
  - Sometime around 800 CE several new farming technologies were either developed or diffused to Europe from North Africa.
    - These include the horse collar and breast-strap harness.
    - These technologies allowed Europeans to replace oxen with horses in agricultural work, a major advance because a horse can plow about three times faster than an ox.
  - Other agricultural innovations around 800 include the heavy plow and the three field system.
    - The heavy plow used a large metal blade to cut into the soil thus increasing the efficiency of farmer's work.
    - Likewise, the three field system improved efficiency by increasing the amount and fertility of land under cultivation.
- ❑ The mild climate and improvements in technology led to rapid population growth which in part spurred what historians term a "Commercial Revolution" in Europe around 1000.



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**GROWTH OF TOWNS TO CITIES**

- ❑ During the early years of this commercial revolution regional fairs emerged.
  - These fairs were generally held on religious holidays in or near the few small towns that existed in Medieval Europe.
  - Peasants from nearby manors would travel to the fairs to buy and sell goods with each other and traveling merchants that brought exotic goods from the east.
- As these fairs became larger and more frequent they spurred the growth of these towns.
  - As the towns grew they became increasingly independent existing largely outside of the authority and traditions of the feudal system.
- With time towns grew into cities, particularly in areas with access to seaborne trade like Italy and Flanders.
- At the height of this commercial revolution several new business institutions developed that further spurred urbanization and economic growth, these include the guild and banks.
  - Guilds were organizations of merchants and artisans that worked together to regulate business practices to ensure the profitability and viability of their respective commodities.
  - Banking provided loans and infrastructure for the monetization of the economy.



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**BOURGEOISIE AND BURGHERS**



- The commercial revolution and urbanization in Europe gave birth to a new social class in the region.
  - This class, made up of artisans, merchants and bankers lived in cities that were outside of the jurisdiction of the feudal system.
  - Many feudal monarchs attempted to bring these cities under their authority, however few were successful, particular in Italy and Flanders.
  - Cities like Venice and Florence became independent republics ruled by this new class that became known as the bourgeoisie or burghers.

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**“THE BLACK DEATH” OR BUBONIC PLAGUE**



- In 1347 a Genoese merchant fleet carrying the bubonic plague docked in Sicily, four years later the plague spread to almost all of Europe, killing about one-third of the population.
- Bubonic plague both fostered and reversed the trends set in motion by the commercial revolution.
  - While fear and death diminished populations in European cities, decreased trade and drove up prices it also severely undermined the feudal system in the countryside.
  - This weakening of the feudal system led to economic growth and development in the long-term.
  - The massive deaths brought on by the plague increased the demand for peasant labor which in turn increased their ability to demand higher wages.
    - When nobles refused to increase wages, serfs and peasants fought back in violent rebellions in England, France, Italy, and Belgium.
    - In the end the grip of the nobility of the peasantry of Europe was forever weakened allowing this population greater freedom to pursue their own economic self-interest.

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