Western Europe
500 – 1000 CE
Political Life in Western Europe

- Western Europe = now a series of regional kingdoms instead of one united empire
- Many Germanic rulers were influenced by and embraced Roman culture
- Many leaders wanted to recreate that unity that existed with the Roman Empire
Charlemagne

- Ruled the Carolingian Empire from 768 to 814 CE
- Set up an imperial bureaucracy
- Standardized weights and measures
- Acted like an old imperial ruler
- Christmas Day of 800 CE = he was crowned the “new Roman emperor” by the Pope
Charlemagne

- His empire was divided among his sons after his death
- Attempt at unity = unsuccessful
Otto I of Saxony

- Created the Holy Roman Empire (mostly Germany and its surrounding areas)
- Ruled from 936 to 973
- Tried to regain unity in Western Europe just like Charlemagne
- Also received title of emperor from the Pope
- Unsuccessful 😞
Medieval Europe: Periodization

Early Middle Ages: 500 – 1000

High Middle Ages: 1000 – 1250

Late Middle Ages: 1250 – 1500
A New Political System

- These new kingdoms = created a highly fragmented and decentralized society
  - Europe full of thousands of independent and isolated manors (estates)
- Gave rise to a new system in Europe = **feudalism** = a political, economic, and social system based on loyalty and military service
A New Political System

- Power = exercised by monarchs and elite landowning lords
- Lesser lords and knights swore allegiance to greater lords and kings
  - Lesser lords = vassals = people who entered into a mutual obligation to a higher lord or monarch
  - Gave them: military protection and support
  - In return they got: land or fiefs
  - Fiefs = estates that came with serfs to work the land
Feudalism

Diagram showing the hierarchy of Feudalism:
- Pope / Church
- Monarch
- Nobles
- Knights
- Vassals
- Merchants
- Farmers
- Craftsmen
- Peasants
- Serfs
Medieval Knights

How Knights Work: Basic Armor Components

- Helmet
- Gorget
- Breastplate
- Gauntlet
- Poleyn
- Greaves
- Sabaton
- Pauldron
- Upper Vambrace
- Cowter
- Lower Vambrace
- Tasset
- Cuisse

Plate armor has many parts, and each part protects a specific area.
A Medieval Castle
Parts of a Medieval Castle
Nobility consisted of lords, ladies, and knights
A lord had almost total authority over his fief
A lady had few, if any, rights
For entertainment, tournaments were held
  - Mock battles between knights
Life of the Nobility

- Other entertainment = archery, big dinners, minstrels, and singers
Becoming a Knight...

- Boys became knights by:
  - Starting as a **page (assistant)** to the lord at age 7
  - At 15, he became a **squire** who assisted a knight
  - Once he proved himself in battle, he was knighted in a ceremony
Becoming a Knight...

- Knights’ behavior was governed by a code of **chivalry**
  - This became the basis for good manners in western society
The Manorial System

- Peasants lived on & worked the lord’s land
- This agricultural economic system is known as **manorialism**
- In return for the lord’s protection, the peasants provided services for the lord
  - Farming, herding, weapon making, etc.
- Most peasants were **serfs** = people who couldn’t leave the lord’s manor without permission
Serfs vs. Slaves

- Serfs = tied to the land; not the personal property of a specific person
- Slaves = belong to their master
The Medieval Manor

A Medieval Manor

- **Land cultivated for the lord**
- **Common fields**
- **Road**

- Manor house
- Barn
- Blacksmith
- Bake house
- Mill
- Village
- Church
- Priest's house
- Spring Planting
- Fallow Field
- Fall Planting
- Forest
- Common Pasture
- Orchard
Christianity of Western Europe

- **Roman Catholicism**
- **How did it spread throughout Western Europe?**
  - Church leaders and missionaries used a “top-down” strategy
  - Converted people at the top (kings and higher lords) first → then they would persuade those below them to convert as well
  - Many kings & lords chose to convert because: they liked the Church’s connection to the “civilized” and “grand” Roman Empire
Christianity of Western Europe

- Church authorities also had a lot of political power
- They worked together with kings, nobles, and knights
  - Rulers gave the Church: protection and support of the religion
  - The Church gave the rulers: religious legitimacy for their power ("It is the will of the Creator...")
- Sometimes they competed for power as well

A Church Leader
The Investiture Conflict

- Conflict over: who should appoint bishops and the pope himself
- The Church? Or kings and emperors?
- Compromise = the Church can select its own officials and rulers retain an informal and symbolic role in the process