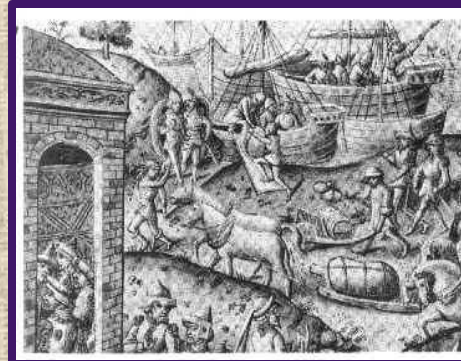


Western Europe: The Edge of the Old World



SOCIETY

Hierarchy and Authority

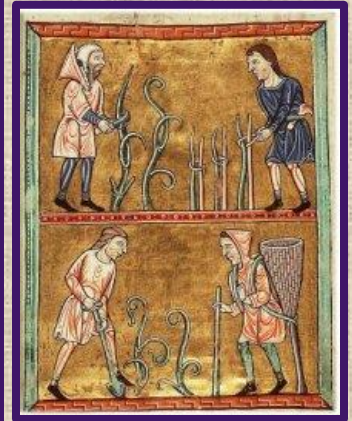
Kings and nobles in European society had control over the average families. In turn, these families- unlike in the previously explored Native American homes- lived in patriarchal systems. Furthermore, fathers also left their land to their oldest son in what is known as primogeniture.

Hierarchy and authority shaped European life at this time because power was held by established churches, nobles, and kings; this security was brought to the Americas and thus shaped society there.



Peasant Society

In 1450, most Europeans were peasants, who, over time, were able to break away from strictly manorial duties in favor of landownership. This led to a surplus of crops and more local market economies.



Peasant life was difficult and took its toll on families. Nearly half of all peasant children died before the age of twenty one. Those who survived were very religious and accepted their difficult lives~ for the most part. Some peasants in Britain, Germany, and Spain wished for a better existence.

In order to survive, peasants had to work nearly constantly, and during all months. Jobs differed between seasons, however.

Expanding Trade Networks

One thousand years before, Arab scholars in the Mediterranean area preserved the Byzantine legacy and thus benefitted from the ability to trade with Asia. In the 1300s, Italians living in the city-states of Genoa, Pisa, Florence, and especially Venice also found favorable trade routes that allowed for Europe to access these goods.



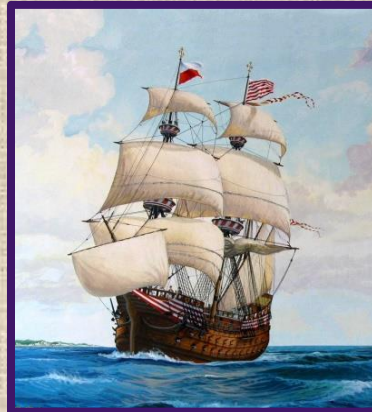
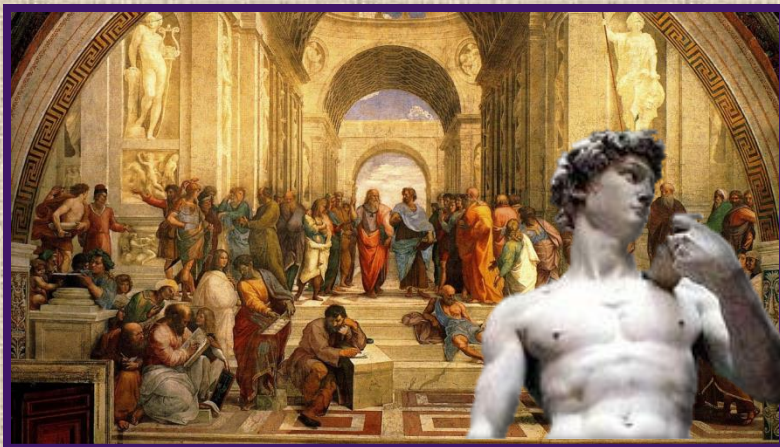
City-states were ruled as republics and governed by wealthy merchants.



The Renaissance

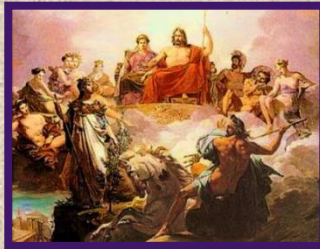


The Renaissance that began in Italy spread across northern and western Europe. When trade increased, merchants and artisans began to have more influence. Also, the power of the king was preferred over that of the nobles., and they eventually began to centralize power. Monarchs let merchants trade through the use of guilds and in return collected taxes from them.



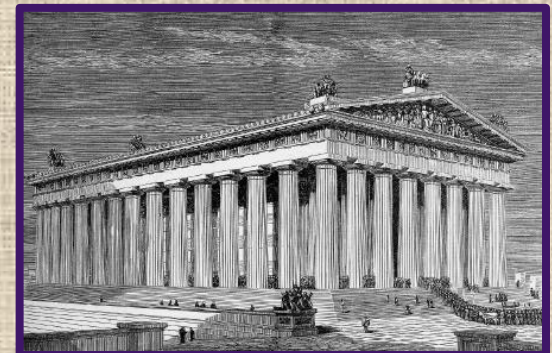
Myths and Religions

The first European religious beliefs were similar to those of Native Americans in the sense that they believed that spiritual forces were at work in the natural world.



The beliefs in Greece and Rome included myths about gods interacting with humans.

After Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, the religion became more accepted and Rome's official religion. The Roman Catholic Church unified many parts of Europe.



The Crusades

Christian rulers tried to stop the spread of Islam, as the religion was a threat to Christian lands. Between 1096 and 1291, multiple Crusades attempted to stop the spread of the Muslim faith. While not very successful from a military standpoint, it affected European society.

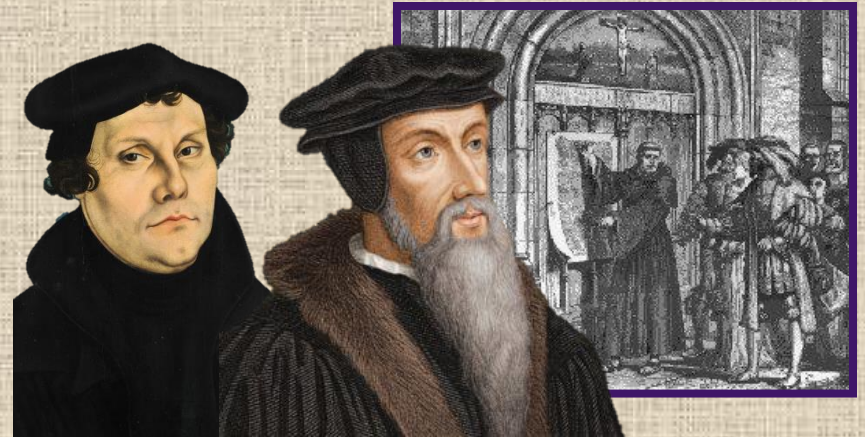
The Crusades made the Christian faith in Europe stronger, along with the persecution of other religions. Western Europe was also introduced to new trade routes and products.



One new product that was brought back was sugar. Eventually, Europeans experimented with growing it themselves. This would later lead to Europe's involvement in the African slave trade.

The Reformation

Martin Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* condemned the corrupt practices of the Catholic church in 1517. He wanted Christians to look more at the Bible instead of the clergy and Church. Because of this, he translated the Bible into German for more people to interpret and understand.



In Switzerland, John Calvin adopted a Protestant regime that stressed human weakness. He preached the doctrine of predestination, the idea that God predetermined those who would go to heaven while the rest were damned.

The Protestant Reformation led to the Catholic Church's Counter-Reformation in order to regain followers and stop more people from converting to Protestantism. This caused competition and conflict in the New World.