

History Level 7

Chapter 3 — Europe and the Mediterranean, 600–1750 — depth topic: Medieval Europe

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Ways of life in medieval Europe: continuity, change and social roles

Chapter 3 — Europe and the Mediterranean, 600–1750 · Section 3A

Content description

VC2HH8K19

Depth topic

Medieval Europe

Elaborations taught

.E01–.E05 (the Medieval-Europe elaborations). The other menu topics of this content description — the Ottoman Empire, Vikings, Renaissance Italy, the Spanish and the Americas, and the emergence of the modern world — are not studied here; their elaboration ids are kept as linkage keys only.

Big question

Between about 500 and 1500 CE, what stayed the same and what changed in how people in medieval Europe lived, and in the roles and relationships between different groups?

Key terms

These words do important work in this section. Each is defined at first use, and collected here so you can check them as you read.

- **medieval** — of the Middle Ages. The **Middle Ages** (or medieval period) is the stretch of European history from about 500 CE to about 1500 CE, between the fall of the western Roman Empire and the start of the modern era.
- **continuity** — the things that stay the same over time.
- **change** — the things that become different over time.
- **feudalism** — a way of organising society around land and service. A ruler granted land to lords; in return the lords gave loyalty and service. Peasants worked the land and gave the lord work, payments or a share of the crop, in return for protection. Historians define this word in slightly different ways; this is the sense used here.
- **the Church** — in this section, the Christian Church in western Europe, led by the Pope in Rome. Nearly everyone in medieval western Europe was Christian, and the Church was a powerful institution.
- **primary source** — a source made at the time being studied, by someone who was there or close to the events.
- **illuminated manuscript** — a book written by hand and decorated with bright paint and gold. (A **manuscript** is any document written by hand; a **scribe** is a person whose job was to copy writing by hand; **monastic** means to do with monks and their monasteries.)

Teaching sequence

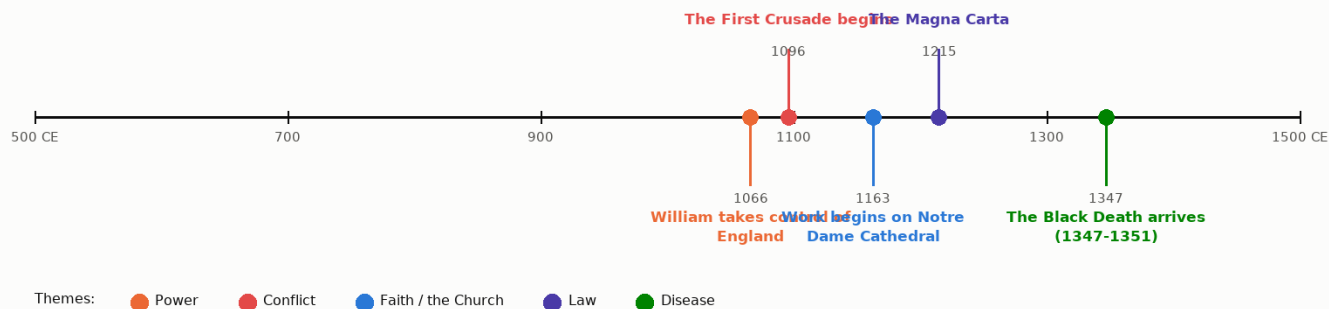
1. *Setting the scene — a world that changed slowly, then all at once*

For about a thousand years, from roughly 500 CE to roughly 1500 CE, most people in western Europe lived in the countryside and worked the land. Their lives were shaped by three great forces: the **Church**, the system of land and service we call **feudalism**, and the seasons of the farming year.

For most of that time, daily life changed very slowly. This is **continuity**: the same groups held much the same roles for generations. But at certain moments life changed sharply — through disease, new contacts with other peoples, and new rules about power. This section follows five of those windows into medieval life, and for each one asks: what stayed the same, what changed, and for whom?

Medieval Europe, about 500 to 1500 CE

Key events, colour-coded by theme. Some themes run through the whole period; others are sudden changes.



A labelled timeline of medieval Europe from about 500 to 1500 CE, showing key events of faith, conflict, law and disease colour-coded by theme

The timeline above sorts the big events into themes so you can see patterns. Notice that some themes (like the power of the Church) run through the whole period — that is continuity — while single events (like the arrival of the plague) are sudden changes.

2. Castles and churches — the Church's hold on wealth, land and labour (.E01)

The Church was the most powerful institution in medieval Europe, and you can still see that power today in the buildings it left behind. Two famous examples are **Warwick Castle** in England and, in Paris, **Notre Dame Cathedral**.

A quick note on these two buildings: castles and churches were different kinds of buildings with different jobs, but both show how much wealth, land and labour powerful groups could command.

- **Warwick Castle** is a castle. William the Conqueror first built a castle at Warwick in 1068, soon after he took control of England. Castles were homes for lords and strongpoints for defence — thick stone walls, towers and a gatehouse built to withstand attack. *Source: English Heritage and Warwick Castle histories of the site's Norman origins, accurate as at 24 August 2026.*
- **Notre Dame Cathedral** is a church — one of the great cathedrals of France. Work began on it in 1163 and it took nearly two centuries to finish. Its tall stone walls, big windows and carved fronts were designed to fill people with awe of God and of the Church. *Source: histories of Notre-Dame de Paris, accurate as at 24 August 2026.*

Both buildings needed huge amounts of **wealth** (money and valuable goods), **land** (the estates that paid for them) and **labour** (the work of stonemasons, carpenters and many other workers). Only very powerful groups could gather all three.

The Church controlled all three:

- **Wealth** — people paid the Church a share of what they produced, and rich lords gave it money and gifts. The Church became one of the wealthiest bodies in Europe.
- **Land** — over the centuries the Church was given and bought vast areas of land. By the later Middle Ages it owned a very large share of the land in western Europe.
- **Labour** — the people who lived on Church land owed it work, just as they owed work to any lord. Monasteries also put that labour to use copying books, farming and caring for the sick.

Castles and cathedrals are therefore **evidence** of power: they stand as proof that the Church and the great lords could command the wealth, land and labour of whole communities.

The Church controlled wealth, land and labour

Buildings like great cathedrals were proof of that power.

What the Church controlled	How it controlled it	The evidence
Wealth (money and goods)	People paid the Church a share of what they produced, and rich lords gave it money and gifts.	Gold and paint in illuminated books; costly stone churches.
Land (estates)	Over centuries the Church was given and bought huge areas of land, becoming one of the biggest landowners.	Monasteries and their farms covered much of western Europe.
Labour (people's work)	People who lived on Church land owed it work, and monasteries put labour to work copying books and farming.	Cathedrals took generations of skilled work to raise, such as Notre Dame from 1163.

A table showing how the Church controlled wealth, land and labour in medieval Europe, with evidence for each

Two great buildings, two kinds of power

Both needed great wealth, land and labour. Each shows a different face of medieval power.

Warwick Castle (England)		Notre Dame Cathedral (Paris)	
What it is	A castle - a strong stone fortress and the home of a lord.	What it is	A church - one of the great cathedrals of France.
Its purpose	Defence and control: a strongpoint to hold the area and show the lord's power.	Its purpose	Worship and awe: to fill people with respect for God and the Church.
Key features	Thick stone walls, towers and a gatehouse built to withstand attack.	Key features	Tall stone walls, large windows and carved fronts.
What it shows	Great lords could command wealth, land and labour.	What it shows	The Church could command wealth, land and labour.

A side-by-side comparison of Warwick Castle and Notre Dame Cathedral, showing their different purposes and features

3. Illuminated manuscripts — how ancient learning survived (. E02)

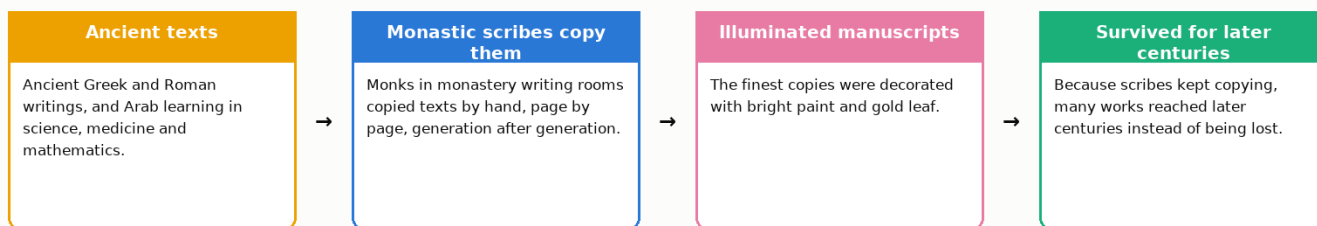
There was no printing in medieval Europe, so every book had to be written out by hand. This work was done mainly by **monastic scribes** — monks who worked in the scriptorium (writing room) of a monastery. They copied texts slowly, page by page, and the finest copies were decorated with bright paint and gold leaf. These decorated books are called **illuminated manuscripts**.

The scribes did more than copy religious books. They also copied the writings of **ancient Greece and Rome**; in some places they copied or drew on **Arab** learning in science, medicine and mathematics. Because scribes kept copying these texts generation after generation, many works that might otherwise have been lost **survived** into later centuries.

This is a clear example of **continuity**: ideas from the ancient world were kept alive through the Middle Ages. It also shows the central role of the Church — because the monasteries belonged to the Church, it was the Church that controlled much of this learning and decided what was copied and kept.

How ancient learning survived the Middle Ages

There was no printing, so every book had to be copied by hand.



This is continuity: the Church's monasteries kept the ideas of the ancient world alive.

A flow diagram showing how monastic scribes copied ancient Greek, Roman and Arab texts so they survived into later centuries

4. Islam and Europe — the results of the Crusades and of trade (. E03)

During the Middle Ages, the relationship between Christian Europe and the world of **Islam** changed a great deal. Two forces caused that change: conflict and trade.

The Crusades were a series of wars that began in 1096, in which armies from Christian Europe marched east to take control of holy places, above all Jerusalem. *Source: standard histories of the Crusades, accurate as at 24 August 2026.* The Crusades brought Christians and Muslims into long, often violent contact.

The **consequences** of the Crusades went far beyond the fighting:

- They caused great loss of life and left a long legacy of suspicion and hostility between many Christians and Muslims.
- But the contact also opened European eyes to goods, foods and ideas from the east. People returning from the east brought back new tastes and new knowledge.

Trade was the other great force, and it often did more to change relationships than war. European **merchants** began to trade more with the east, buying luxury goods such as silk and spices and selling cloth and other goods in return. Trade towns, especially in Italy, grew rich.

So the relations between Islam and Europe changed in two directions at once: conflict could breed distrust, while trade built new connections and a flow of goods and ideas between the two worlds.

Two forces shaped relations between Islam and Europe

Conflict and trade changed the relationship at the same time, in different ways.

The Crusades (conflict)

Wars that began in 1096, as armies from Christian Europe marched east to take holy places such as Jerusalem.

Brought Christians and Muslims into long, often violent contact.

Cost many lives and left a long legacy of distrust between the two sides.

Trade (exchange)

European merchants bought luxury goods from the east, such as silk and spices.

Trade towns, above all in Italy, grew rich on this exchange.

Contact through trade also carried foods, skills and ideas between the two worlds.

A two-part diagram of relations between Islam and medieval Europe, showing the conflict of the Crusades on one side and the exchange of trade on the other

5. The Magna Carta — who gained and who did not (.E04)

In 1215, a group of powerful nobles forced King John of England to accept a document called the **Magna Carta** (Latin for “Great Charter”). They were angry about heavy taxes and the way the king used his power. The Magna Carta set down the idea that even a king must obey the law, and it limited some of the king’s powers. *Source: British Library, Magna Carta and its legacy, accurate as at 24 August 2026.*

The Magna Carta is a famous moment of **political change**. But change did not touch everyone equally. Its impact was very different from one social group to another:

- **The nobility** gained the most. The charter protected their rights and said the king could not take certain payments from them without agreement.
- **Religious orders** (the Church and its bodies) were promised that the king would not interfere with their freedom to run their own affairs.
- **Merchants** benefited from clauses that set fair weights and measures and protected trade.
- **Workers and craftsmen, peasants and women** gained little or nothing at the time. The charter was mainly about the rights of powerful, free, landholding men — not about ordinary people.

This is an important lesson in perspective: the same event can be a big change for one group and very little change at all for another.

The Magna Carta, 1215 - who gained and who did not

The same event was a big change for some groups and very little change for others.

Social group	What changed for them	Impact
The nobility	Protected their rights; the king could not take certain payments without agreement.	Gained the most
Religious orders	Promised that the king would not interfere with the Church running its own affairs.	Gained
Merchants	Won fair weights and measures, which protected trade.	Gained
Workers and craftsmen	The charter said little about them, so daily life stayed much the same.	Little or none
Peasants	Most were not free landholders, so the charter's rights did not reach them.	Little or none
Women	Gained little or nothing from the charter at the time.	Little or none

The Magna Carta was mainly about the rights of powerful, free, landholding men - not ordinary people.

A table showing what the Magna Carta of 1215 changed for different social groups, from the nobility to peasants and women

6. The Black Death — a population collapse and its consequences (.E05)

In 1347 a terrible disease reached Europe. It is known as the **Black Death** (a form of plague). By the time it eased around 1351 it had killed a huge share of the population. Historians commonly estimate that about one-third of Europe's people died, and some put the figure even higher. *Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Black Death"; O. Benedictow, The Black Death 1346–1353 (2004); P. Daileader, The Late Middle Ages — estimates vary; accurate as at 24 August 2026.*

How do we know this? One important source is **church records**. Parish priests recorded burials and deaths, and by counting these records historians can estimate how many people died and how the population changed.

But we must question the **reliability** of these statistics:

- Records were not kept the same way everywhere, and some places kept no records at all.
- In the hardest months, so many people died that there was no time to record them.
- Church records mainly count people connected to a parish, so they can miss others.

Because of these problems, historians disagree about exactly how many died. The numbers are best read as informed estimates, not exact counts.

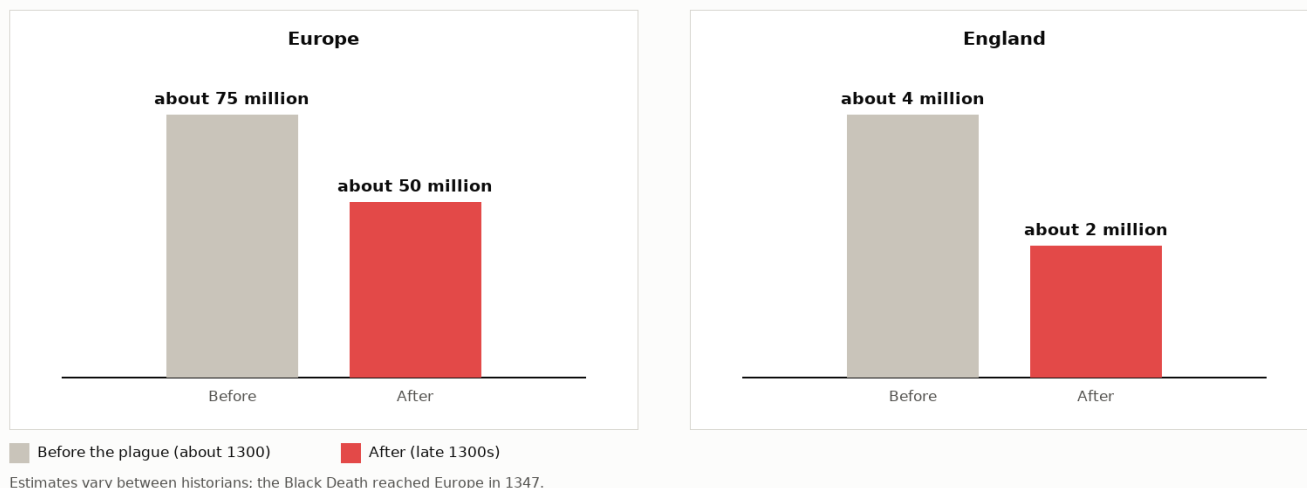
The population collapse had deep **consequences** for how people lived and for the relationships between groups:

- **Farming** — with far fewer workers, there was a shortage of labour. The peasants who survived found they could ask for better pay and conditions, because lords now had to compete for their work.
- **Commerce** — trade was shaken at first, but in time the fewer survivors often had more to share.
- **Culture and religion** — many people lost faith that the Church could protect them, and this weakened the Church's grip on daily life.

The Black Death is one of the clearest examples of sudden, sweeping **change** in the Middle Ages. It changed the balance of power between lords and peasants, and it helps explain why the old way of life, based on land and service, began to weaken after 1350.

Population before and after the Black Death

Historians' estimates (rounded). Each panel uses its own scale; read the labels.



A bar chart of historians' estimates of population before and after the Black Death, for Europe and for England

7. Bringing it together — what stayed the same, what changed

Medieval Europe, c. 500-1500 CE - continuity and change

For each part of life, some things stayed the same while others changed.

Part of life	What stayed the same (continuity)	What changed
Farming	Most people worked the land, and the seasons set the rhythm of the farming year.	After the Black Death there were fewer workers, so the peasants who survived could ask for better pay and conditions.
The Church and faith	The Church stayed central to daily life and to learning across the whole period.	After the Black Death, many people lost faith that the Church could protect them, weakening its hold.
Power and law	Kings and great lords held most of the power.	In 1215 the Magna Carta set limits on the king's power - even a king must obey the law.
Trade and contact	People exchanged goods with nearby lands throughout the period.	The Crusades and trade with the east brought new goods, foods and ideas; trade towns in Italy grew rich.
The social order	A rich, powerful few ruled over many poor workers, and this changed only slowly.	After 1350 the balance of power between lords and peasants shifted, and the old system of land and service began to weaken.

Ask of any event: did it change life for everyone, or only some groups? Did it change things quickly or slowly? Did its effects last?

A table of aspects of medieval life, showing what stayed the same and what changed over the period

Across the whole period you can see both continuity and change:

- **Continuity** — most people stayed farmers; the Church stayed central to life and learning; and the basic pyramid of rich, powerful few above many poor workers changed only slowly.
- **Change** — disease, the Crusades, growing trade and new limits on royal power all shifted how people lived and how groups related to one another. The Black Death, above all, changed the balance between lords and peasants.

A useful way to think about any medieval event is to ask three questions: **Did it change life for everyone, or only some groups? Did it change things quickly or slowly? And did its effects last?**

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — with help (.E01)

Task. Use Warwick Castle or Notre Dame Cathedral to explain how the Church or the great lords controlled wealth, land and labour.

Step	Model response	Why this works
Make a point	Notre Dame Cathedral shows how powerful the Church was.	Start with a clear claim linked to the question.
Add evidence	It took nearly two centuries to build, starting in 1163, and needed vast amounts of stone, money and skilled workers.	Use a real, dated detail.
Explain	Only a very rich and powerful institution could pay for and organise such a huge building over so long.	Connect the evidence to the idea of control.
Link to the question	So the cathedral is evidence that the Church controlled great wealth, land and labour.	Finish by answering the question directly.

Source for the dated detail: histories of Notre-Dame de Paris, accurate as at 24 August 2026.

Worked example 2 — with help (.E05)

Task. A parish church record shows that burials in one town rose sharply in 1349. Explain what this suggests, and give one reason to be careful about the number.

Step	Model response	Why this works
Make a point	The sharp rise in burials suggests that many more people than usual were dying in 1349.	Read the record for what it shows.
Add context	This fits with the arrival of the Black Death, which swept through Europe from 1347.	Link the source to the wider event.
Question reliability	But the number may not be exact — in the hardest months so many people died that some deaths were never recorded.	Show you can question the statistic.
Link to the question	So the record is strong evidence of a big rise in deaths, even if the exact figure is uncertain.	Balance the value and the limit.

Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Black Death”, accurate as at 24 August 2026.

Practice tasks

Practice with help

Q1. Give two things that stayed the same for most people in medieval Europe between about 500 and 1500 CE. (Use the word **continuity**.)

Q2. Name the two buildings in this section that show the power of the Church and the great lords, and say whether each is a castle or a church.

Q3. Define **illuminated manuscript**. Then explain one way monastic scribes helped ancient Greek, Roman and Arab texts to survive.

Q4. Give one consequence of the Crusades that caused conflict, and one way that trade changed relations between Islam and Europe.

Q5. Which social group gained the most from the Magna Carta, and which group gained little or nothing? Give one example of each.

Q6. List two reasons why historians must be careful when they use church records to count the deaths caused by the Black Death.

Practice on your own

Q7. “The Black Death was the most important change to life in medieval Europe.” Do you agree? Use evidence from this section to support your answer, and consider at least one other change.

Q8. Explain how the roles and relationship of lords and peasants changed after the Black Death. Why did the balance of power shift?

Q9. Choose one event from the timeline. Explain whether it mainly caused continuity or change, and for which groups.

Q10. “The Magna Carta changed life for everyone in medieval England.” Use this section to evaluate that claim. Which groups did it help, and which did it leave out?

Source-based inquiry task

Read this description of real evidence from the Black Death, then answer the questions.

The evidence. In late 1348 or early 1349, as the plague spread through London, the city’s churchyards could not hold all the dead. New burial grounds were set up outside the city walls, including one at East Smithfield. Researchers have dug up part of the site and found hundreds of burials laid in neat rows; the whole ground is thought to hold the bodies of more than 2,000 people. Tests on teeth from some of the skeletons confirmed the germ that causes the plague.

Source: Museum of London Archaeology and Historic England records of the East Smithfield Black Death burial ground, with plague-germ DNA findings reported in 2016; accurate as at 24 August 2026.

1. Is the burial ground a primary source or a secondary source for the Black Death? Give a reason.
 2. Give two things the burial ground can tell you about how the Black Death affected London.
 3. Give one reason a historian must be careful about using this one burial ground to count the dead of London.
 4. Name one other type of evidence you could check the burial ground against, and say how it would help.
-

Checking your understanding

Use these points to check your answers. They are not the only correct words — they are the ideas to reach.

- **Q1** — most people farmed the land; the Church stayed central; the rich-few-over-poor-many order changed only slowly.
- **Q2** — Warwick Castle is a castle; Notre Dame Cathedral is a church (cathedral).
- **Q3** — a book written by hand and decorated with paint and gold; scribes copied the texts over and over so they were not lost.
- **Q4** — conflict: loss of life and lasting distrust; trade: goods such as silk and spices moved between east and west, building connections.

- **Q5** — gained most: the nobility; gained little: peasants, workers and women.
- **Q6** — records were uneven or missing; too many deaths at once to record them all.
- **Q7–Q10** — a strong answer makes a clear claim, uses at least one dated detail from this section, names the groups affected, and considers both change and continuity. For Q10, the best answers note that the Magna Carta mainly helped powerful free men and did little for peasants, workers and women.

Key terms for this section

Each term is defined where it is first used in the text. Keep these close as you read.

Medieval

To do with the Middle Ages, the stretch of European history from about 500 CE to about 1500 CE.

Continuity

The things that stay the same over time.

Change

The things that become different over time.

Feudalism

A way of organising society around land and service: a ruler granted land to lords, and peasants worked the land in return for protection.

The Church

The Christian Church in western Europe, led by the Pope in Rome. It was a powerful institution.

Primary source

A source made at the time being studied, by someone who was there or close to the events.

Illuminated manuscript

A book written by hand and decorated with bright paint and gold.

Scribe and monastic

A scribe copied writing by hand. Monastic means to do with monks and their monasteries.

A set of key terms for this section with short definitions

Why medieval Europe changed: turning points, causes and consequences

This section studies Europe in the Middle Ages, the long period from about 500 CE to about 1500 CE. The word **medieval** means “from the Middle Ages”; it comes from Latin words meaning “middle ages”. We follow five developments — the great migrations (Germanic peoples, Huns and Slavs), Charlemagne’s rule, the Norman invasion (1066), the first Crusade, and the plague called the Black Death — and we ask the same two questions of each that historians keep asking: *what caused it?* and *what changed because of it?*

Four words carry the weight of this section.

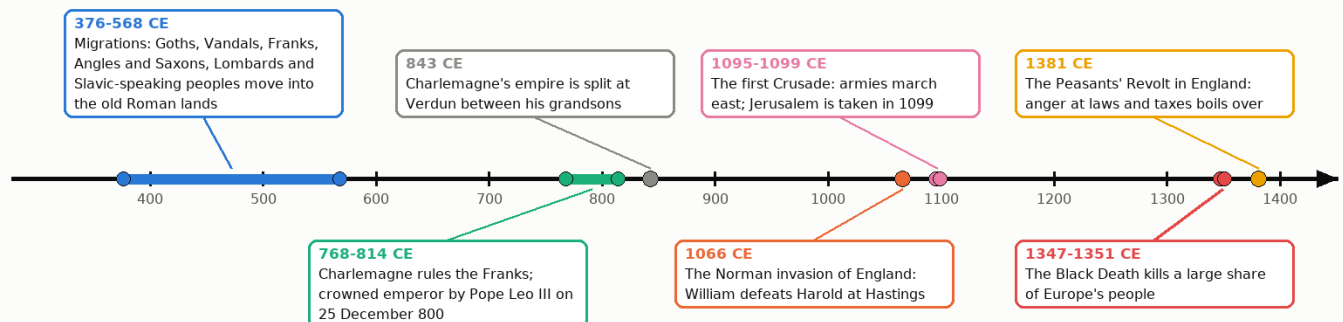
- A **cause** is something that makes an event happen. Causes can build up slowly (years of hunger, for example) or arrive suddenly (the death of a king, for example).
- A **consequence** is what happens because of an event. Some consequences arrive within a lifetime; others take centuries to work out.
- An **event** happens in one place and time — the Battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066 is an event. A **development** is a bigger change that builds up over time, such as the spread of castles across England.
- A **turning point** is an event or development after which things are clearly different from before.

Two source skills you will use here: a **primary source** was made in the time being studied (the Bayeux Tapestry, stitched in the 1070s CE, is one); a **secondary source** was made later, often by historians, using primary sources as evidence. Dates in this section are written in CE (Common Era), with the day first: 14 October 1066.

Curriculum focus. This section teaches **VC2HH8K20** through three elaborations: **VC2HH8K20.E01** (the five developments listed above — the migrations studied as movements into western and central Europe), **VC2HH8K20.E02** (the Church’s part in shaping western European institutions such as kingship) and **VC2HH8K20.E03** (what caused the feudal order to form, and its impacts).

Five developments in medieval Europe, 370-1381 CE

Each one changed what came after it. The bars show how long each development lasted.



Use this line to check order: which development came first, and which came last?

A timeline of medieval Europe from 370 to 1381 CE, marking seven dated events above and below the line

The timeline above places the five developments of this section on one line, from the Goths crossing the river Danube in 376 CE to the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381.

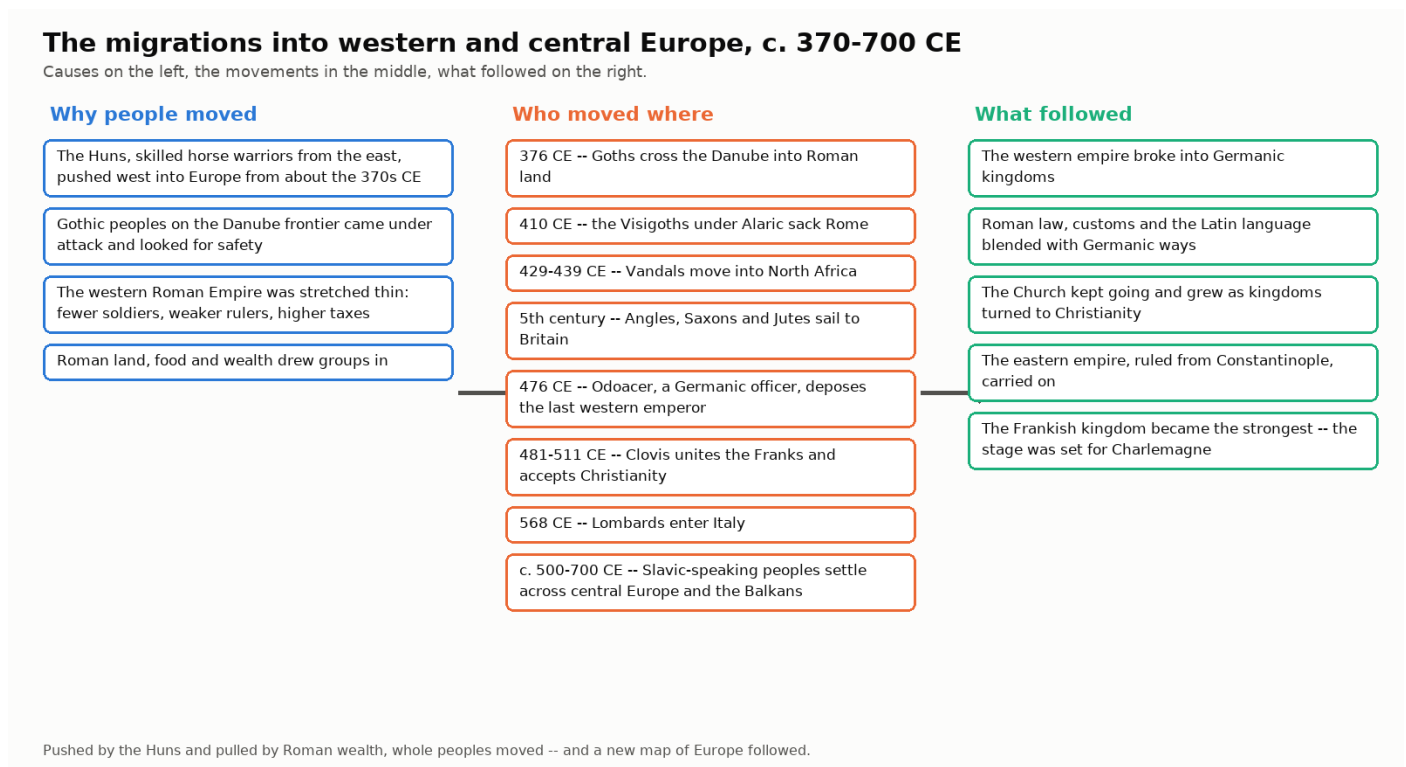
Theory

1. The great migrations — Germanic peoples, Huns and Slavs (c. 370–700 CE). Here “migrations” means whole peoples moving — sometimes fighting, sometimes settling and farming. The causes stacked up: the Huns, skilled

riders from central Asia, pushed west into Europe and forced other peoples to move; the defences of the Roman Empire along its borders grew weaker; and many groups wanted safer land, food and wealth. The dated movements to know:

- 376 CE — the Goths cross the river Danube into Roman land.
 - 410 CE — the Goths under Alaric sack Rome (take the city by force and rob it).
 - 429–439 CE — the Vandals move into Roman North Africa.
 - Through the fifth century — Angles, Saxons and Jutes cross the sea and settle in Britain.
 - 476 CE — Odoacer, a Germanic army leader, removes the last western Roman emperor from power. Historians often use this year to mark the end of the western half of the Roman Empire.
 - 481–511 CE — Clovis unites the Franks, a Germanic people, and becomes a Christian.
 - 568 CE — the Lombards enter Italy.
 -
- c. 500–700 CE — Slavic peoples settle across central and eastern Europe.

The consequences were large: the western empire broke into smaller kingdoms; languages, laws and customs blended; the Church survived the breakdown and carried reading, writing and organisation into the new kingdoms. These changes set the ground for everything else in this section.



Causes, movements and outcomes of the great migrations (Germanic peoples, Huns and Slavs), laid out in three columns

2. The rule of Charlemagne (768–814 CE). Charlemagne (“Charles the Great”) was king of the Franks from 768 to 814 CE. The background matters: in 751 CE, his father Pepin had been **anointed** (made holy with oil) by Pope Stephen II, which made Frankish rule look God-given. Charlemagne fought long wars — against the Lombards in Italy and the Saxons in the north-east — until he was the strongest ruler in western Europe. On 25 December 800 CE, in Rome, Pope Leo III crowned him **emperor**. The causes of that crowning sit on both sides of the relationship: the Frankish–Church friendship stretching back to 751, Charlemagne’s power, and the fact that Pope Leo III needed a strong protector. The consequences: for the first time since Rome, one ruler held most of western Europe; Charlemagne used his power to lift learning, setting up a palace school at Aachen with the scholar Alcuin, while monks copied old texts as **manuscripts** (books written by hand); and the ceremony set a pattern — popes crowning rulers — that kept the Church and the crown joined in politics for centuries. Charlemagne died in 814 CE. In 843 CE, at Verdun, his grandsons split the empire into three parts, and royal power weakened. That weakness is one cause of our next development, the feudal order.

Charlemagne: causes, the event, consequences

A cause web for Worked example 1. Every arrow runs left to right, from cause to consequence.

Causes (before 800)

- Since 751 CE, popes had anointed Frankish kings -- a growing alliance between the Franks and the Church
- Charlemagne had won long wars: Lombards in Italy, Saxons in the north, raids into Spain
- Pope Leo III needed a strong protector in Rome

The event: on 25 December 800 CE Pope Leo III crowns Charlemagne emperor in Rome

Consequences (after 800)

- For the first time since Rome, one ruler held most of western Europe
- Learning was lifted: a palace school at Aachen, Alcuin of York as teacher, monks copying old texts
- Kings and Church grew closer: popes could now crown rulers
- After 843 CE his grandsons split the empire at Verdun -- weaker kings faced new invasions, helping the feudal order to form

Notice how one consequence (the 843 split) became the cause of the next development -- the feudal order.

A cause, event and consequence web for the rule of Charlemagne

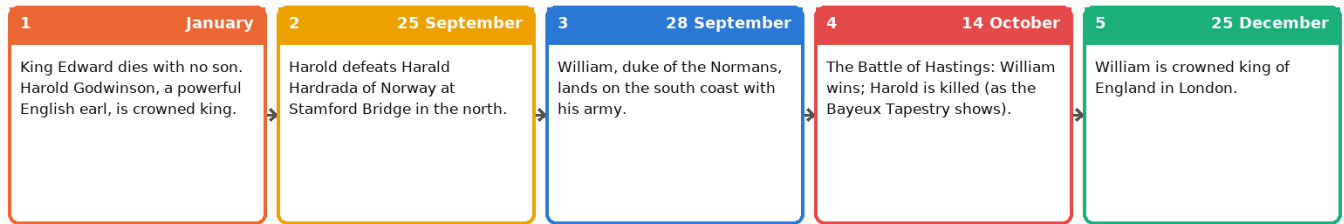
3. The Norman invasion of England (1066). The cause was a succession problem: in January 1066, King Edward of England died with no son to follow him, and no clear **heir** (the next person in line to rule). Two powerful men said the throne should be theirs — Harold Godwinson, an English noble, and William, duke of the Normans, whose homeland lay across the sea. Harald Hardrada of Norway also wanted the crown. The sequence to know:

1. January 1066 — Edward dies; Harold Godwinson is crowned king.
2. 25 September 1066 — Harold defeats Hardrada at Stamford Bridge, in the north of England.
3. 28 September 1066 — William lands with his army in the south.
4. 14 October 1066 — William defeats Harold at the Battle of Hastings; Harold dies.
5. 25 December 1066 — William is crowned king of England.

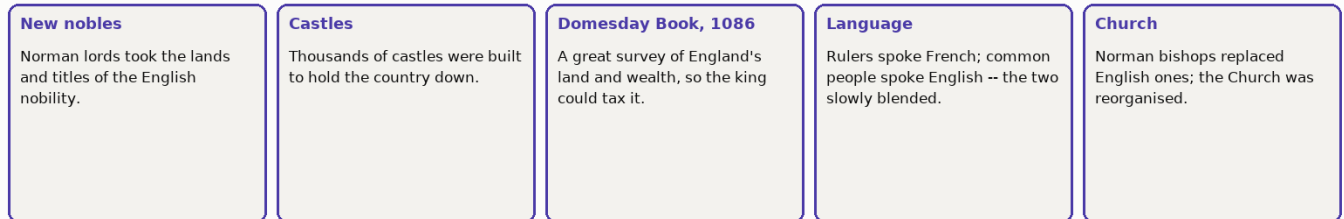
Harold's army, tired after marching north and then south again, helps explain the result. The consequences reshaped England: Norman nobles took the great estates; castles rose to hold the land; the Church was reorganised under Norman bishops; Norman French mixed with English, which over centuries became the English we speak; and in 1086 the king's officers made the Domesday Book, a survey of England's land, stock and wealth so the king could tax. Three primary sources carry the story: the Bayeux Tapestry (stitched in the 1070s CE, about 70 metres of cloth showing the story in pictures — made for the Norman side, the winners), the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (the English side, written year by year in monasteries), and the Domesday Book itself (1086 CE).

One year that changed England: 1066 CE

Five events in order -- then the consequences that lasted far longer than the year.



Consequences that outlasted the year



The Bayeux Tapestry, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Domesday Book are our three great sources for this story.

The five dated steps of 1066 in order, with five consequence cards below

4. The first Crusade (1095–1099). A **crusade** was a war called for by the pope to win back a holy place; in this section the word always means the armed journeys of western Europeans towards Jerusalem. The causes worked on several levels: Alexios I, emperor of the eastern Roman Empire ruled from Constantinople, asked Pope Urban II for help against Turkish armies pressing into his lands; at Clermont in November 1095, Urban preached the crusade and crowds cried out that God willed it; knights saw a chance for land, wealth and standing; and Jerusalem was already a holy place that pilgrims travelled to. The events: the crusaders took Nicaea in 1097 and Antioch in 1098, and on 15 July 1099 they took Jerusalem by force after a siege, and many people in the city were killed. The consequences: the crusaders set up four states in the east (Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli and Jerusalem); trade between Europe and the eastern Mediterranean grew; and before the main armies even left, in 1096, groups attacked Jewish communities along the river Rhine and many people were killed — historians count this among the darkest events of the period. The crusade also deepened the split between western (Latin) Christians and eastern Christians, and between Christians and Muslims. Fulcher of Chartres, a priest who went on the crusade, wrote about it in the 1120s CE — one side of the story, told by a man who believed in it.

The first Crusade (1095-1099): causes and consequences

A crusade was a war preached by the pope; the word comes from 'cross'. Sort the points below into causes and consequences.

Causes

The eastern Roman Empire, ruled from Constantinople, had lost land to Turkish Muslim armies

Emperor Alexios I asked Pope Urban II for military help

Urban saw a chance to unite Europe's fighting men under the Church

Preachers promised forgiveness of sins to those who went

Some knights wanted land, wealth or adventure

Pope Urban II preaches the crusade at Clermont, November 1095; Jerusalem is taken on 15 July 1099

Consequences

Four 'crusader states' were set up: Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli and Jerusalem

Deep wounds between Christians and Muslims -- and attacks on Jewish communities along the Rhine in 1096

More travel and trade between Europe and the eastern Mediterranean: goods, ideas and learning crossed both ways

The pope's standing rose; more expeditions followed

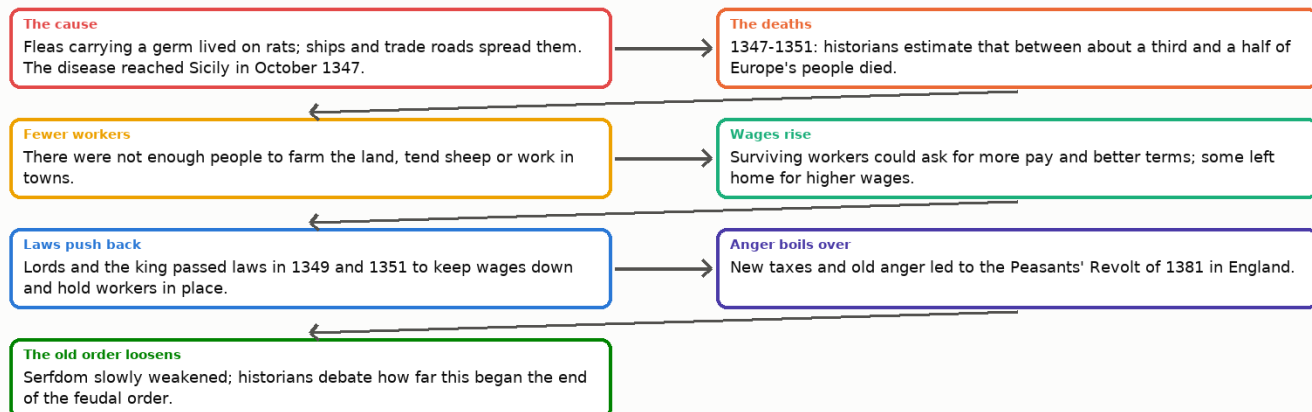
The same event is a consequence of earlier causes and a cause of later ones -- that is what makes it a turning point.

Causes and consequences of the first Crusade, on either side of a centre banner

5. The Black Death (1347–1351 and after). The cause was a germ, *Yersinia pestis*, carried by fleas that lived on rats; ships and trade roads spread it. It reached the port of Caffa in 1346, Sicily in October 1347, and then moved fast across Europe. Between 1347 and 1351, historians estimate that between about a third and a half of Europe's people died. The consequences ran in a chain — each one the effect of the one before it: with so many people dead there were **fewer workers** to farm the land, tend sheep or work in towns; surviving workers could ask for **higher wages** and better terms; lords and the king answered with **laws in 1349 and 1351** to keep wages down and hold workers in place; new taxes and old anger then boiled over into the **Peasants' Revolt of 1381** in England; and across it all, **serfdom slowly weakened**, and historians debate how far this began the end of the old order. Population never bounced back quickly: England's people fell from about 5 million around 1300 to about 2 million by 1400. Two writers saw it happen: Henry Knighton, a monk at an abbey in Leicester, wrote about it in the 1390s CE; Jean de Venette, a friar in France, wrote in the 1350s CE about what he saw with his own eyes.

The Black Death: one event, a chain of consequences

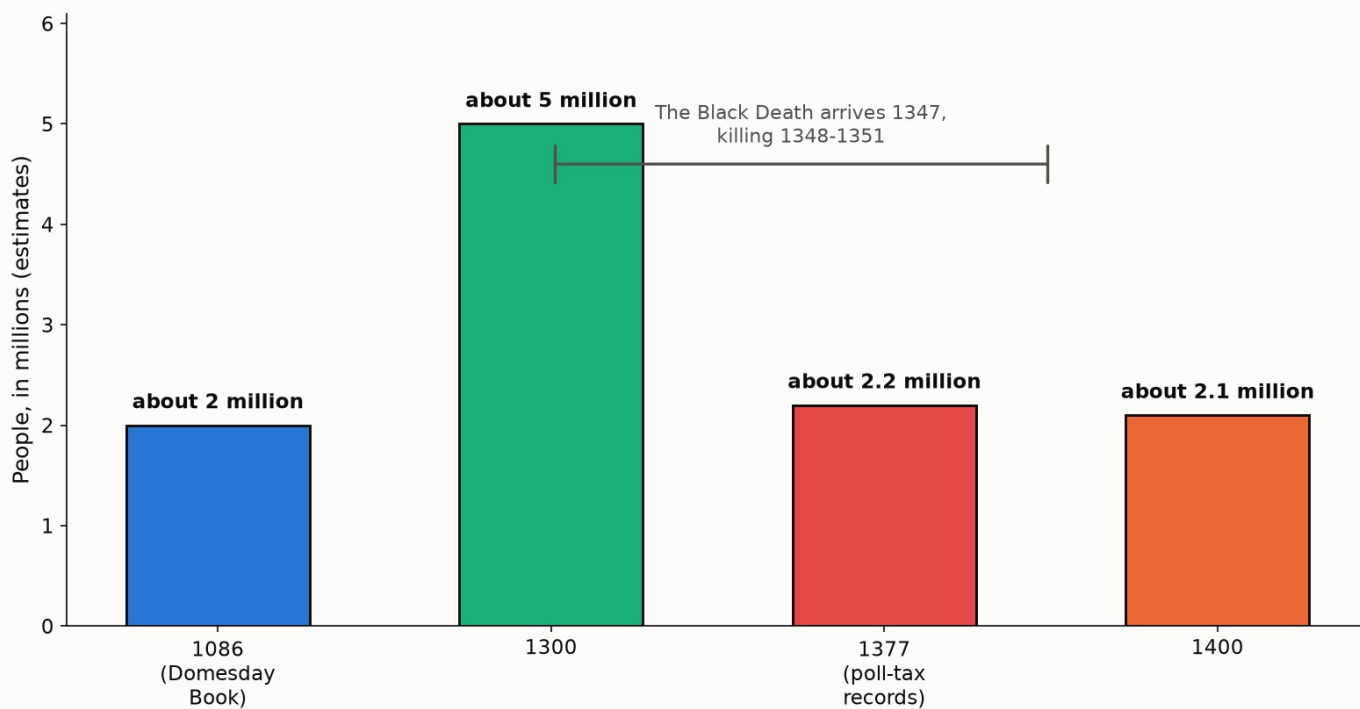
Read left to right, then down. Each box is the consequence of the one before it -- and the cause of the one after.



The chain: disease → deaths → fewer workers → higher wages → laws → revolt → a weaker old order.

A seven-box chain of consequences for the Black Death, from disease to a weaker old order

England's population: one set of historians' estimates



Estimates vary between historians. They are drawn here as summarised by J. Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348-1530* (1977), from records such as the Domesday Book (1086) and tax records (1377).

A bar chart of population estimates for England in 1086, 1300, 1377 and 1400, showing a sharp fall after the Black Death

The population numbers above are estimates — J. Hatcher (*Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348-1530*, 1977) is one standard guide — and they vary between historians. The pattern matters more than any single number: growth to about 1300, then a sharp fall from which England took centuries to recover.

6. The Church, kingship and western European institutions (VC2HH8K20.E02). An **institution** is a lasting way of organising life in a society — a system of law, a form of rule, a church. The Church shaped nearly all of them. Its biggest impact was on **kingship** itself — the office and power of a king: popes and bishops crowned and anointed kings, so their rule looked God-given, which made kings stronger and harder to go against. But the exchange ran both ways. The Church gave kings its learning — bishops and monks who could read and write kept records and gave advice — plus Church law (called **canon law**) and Church courts, and prayers, teaching and festivals that kept communities loyal. Kings gave the Church grants of land and wealth, protection in war, a say in choosing bishops, and

laws backing the **tithe** (one tenth of a farm's produce paid to the Church each year). Consequence: government and religion were joined, and the parish church stood at the centre of village life — baptism, marriage, burial and the weekly service all happened there. Monasteries kept learning alive through the whole period, copying texts by hand.

Kings and the Church: a two-way exchange

Each side gave the other something it needed. Follow the arrows both ways.

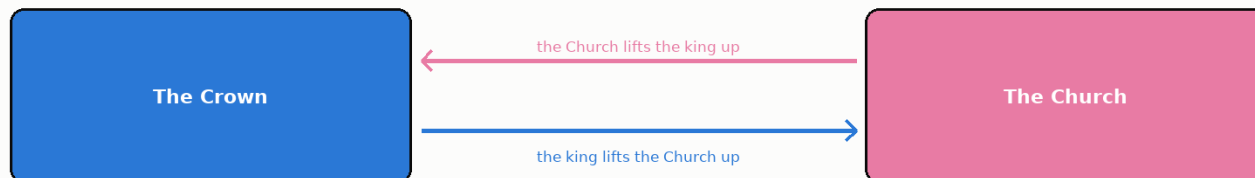
What the Church gave kings

crowning and anointing kings, so their rule looked God-given

bishops and monks who could read and write, to keep records and give advice

Church law (canon law) and Church courts

prayers, teaching and festivals that kept communities loyal



What kings gave the Church

grants of land and wealth to the Church

protection in times of war

a say in choosing bishops

laws backing the Church's right to the tithe

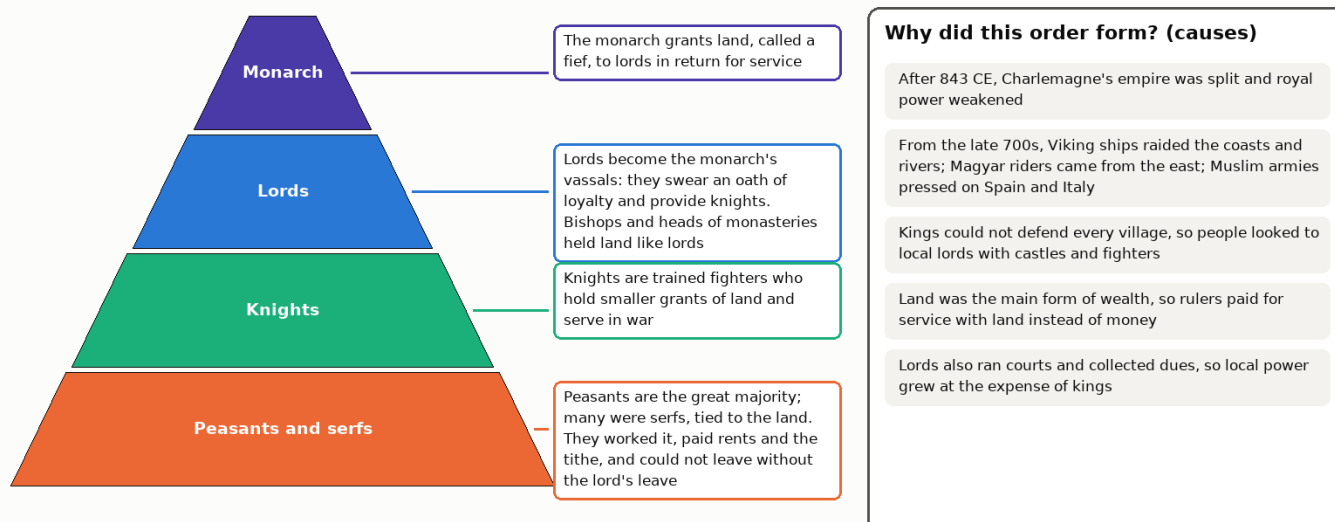
Consequence: government and religion were joined. The parish church stood at the centre of village life.

A two-way exchange between kings and the Church, with arrows in both directions

7. How the feudal order formed (VC2HH8K20.E03). Feudalism is the name historians give to the way medieval society was ordered: land was held in return for service and loyalty, and lords held local power over the people who worked their land. The word is debated — read the box below before you use it. The causes of the feudal order follow straight on from what you have read: after 843 CE Charlemagne's empire was split and royal power weakened; from the late 700s, Viking ships raided the coasts and rivers, Magyar riders came from the east, and Muslim armies pressed on Spain and Italy; kings could not defend every village, so people looked to local lords with castles and fighting men; and because land was the main form of wealth, rulers paid for service with land instead of money. The order itself had four levels: the **monarch** granted land, called a **fief**, to lords; the lords became the monarch's **vassals**, swearing an oath of loyalty and providing knights; **knights** were trained fighters who held smaller fiefs and served in war; and the **peasants** — the great majority of the people — worked the land, paid rents and the tithe, and many of them were **serfs**, unfree workers tied to the land who could not leave without the lord's leave (their condition is called **serfdom**). Bishops and heads of monasteries held land like lords, so the Church fitted into every level. The impacts divided by station: protection and local order for some, and hard work with few freedoms for most.

The feudal order: who stood where, and why it formed

Feudalism is the name historians give to this way of organising society. It is a contested word -- see the box in the text.



Impacts: protection and order for some; hard work and few freedoms for most. The Church fitted into every level.

The feudal order as a pyramid of four levels, with legend cards and a causes panel

A debated word: feudalism. “Feudalism” is a modern label, built by historians from the Latin word for a fief. No one in the Middle Ages called their own society “feudalism”: it is an analytical term — a tool for thinking with, not a name people of the time used. Historians argue about how well the tool works.

The strongest case for the word: in *Feudal Society* (1939–1940), Marc Bloch argued that the label is fair, because across Europe land really was held in return for service, oaths really did bind lords and fighting men, and kingship itself worked through these ties. The word gathers many local customs into one pattern that can be studied and compared.

The strongest case against the word: in *Fiefs and Vassals* (1994), Susan Reynolds argued that the tidy pyramid is in large part a picture built by later writers. Medieval people dealt with kings, courts, law and custom far more than with formal agreements about land, she said, and the word can hide how different places and times really were.

How we use it in this section: “feudalism” and “the feudal order” mean the pattern in which land was granted in return for service and loyalty, and in which lords held local power over the people who worked their land. Keep that working definition in mind — and remember that historians still debate how well the label fits.

Where the facts come from. Every claim above rests on sources like these. A primary source comes from the time being studied; keep the warning column in mind whenever you use one.

The primary sources in this section

A primary source comes from the time being studied. Keep the warning column in mind when you use each one.

Source	Made	What it shows	Warning
Einhard, Life of Charlemagne	c. 830s CE	Charlemagne's wars, his court, his character	Einhard served Charlemagne and admired him
The Bayeux Tapestry	c. 1070s CE	The story of 1066 in pictures, about 70 metres of stitched cloth	Made for the Norman side -- the winners
The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle	entries for 1066	The English side of 1066, year by year	Written in monasteries, with their own views
Domesday Book	1086 CE	A survey of England's land, stock and wealth	Made so the king could tax -- it lists value, not feelings
Fulcher of Chartres, chronicle	c. 1120s CE	The first Crusade by a priest who went along	One side of a holy war, written for pilgrims
Henry Knighton, chronicle	1390s CE	The Black Death in England: dead sheep, scarce workers, high wages	Written years after the event, from a monastery
Jean de Venette, chronicle	1350s CE	The plague in France as the writer saw it	One friar's view; he blamed others' sins

No single source tells the whole story -- historians read them together, and against the evidence in the ground.

A table of the seven primary sources used in this section, with dates and warnings

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help

Task. Write a paragraph explaining the causes and consequences of Charlemagne being crowned emperor on 25 December 800 CE. Build it sentence by sentence.

Working

Comment

Sentence 1: "On 25 December 800 CE, in Rome, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, king of the Franks, as emperor."

Set the scene first: when, where, who. Give the exact date.

Sentence 2: "This did not happen by chance. Since 751 CE, popes had anointed Frankish kings, and Charlemagne had won long wars that made him the strongest ruler in western Europe."

Explain a first cause: the Frankish–Church friendship, and Charlemagne's own power.

Sentence 3: "Pope Leo III also needed a strong protector, so crowning Charlemagne helped the pope as well as the king."

Explain a second cause, from the pope's side. Two causes beat one.

Sentence 4: "At once, one ruler held most of western Europe for the first time since Rome, and Charlemagne used his power to lift learning, with monks copying old texts."

Give a short-term consequence — what changed straight away.

Sentence 5: "In the long run, the ceremony set a pattern: popes could crown rulers, so kings and the Church stayed joined in politics for centuries."

Give a long-term consequence — what the event kept changing.

Sentence 6: "For these reasons, the crowning of 800 CE was a turning point: its causes lay in the Frankish–Church friendship, and its consequences shaped how Europe was ruled."

Link back to the question, using the words *cause*, *consequence* and *turning point*.

A model paragraph: causes and consequences of the crowning of Charlemagne

Each coloured part does one job. Use the same shape for your own writing.

Set the scene

On 25 December 800 CE, in Rome, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, king of the Franks, as emperor.

Set the scene (when, who)

Explain a cause

This did not happen by chance. Since 751 CE, popes had anointed Frankish kings, and Charlemagne had won long wars that made him the strongest ruler in western Europe.

Explain a cause

Explain another cause

Pope Leo III also needed a strong protector, so crowning Charlemagne helped the pope as well as the king.

Explain another cause

Give a short-term consequence

At once, one ruler held most of western Europe for the first time since Rome, and Charlemagne used his power to lift learning, with monks copying old texts.

Give a short-term consequence

Give a long-term consequence

In the long run, the ceremony set a pattern: popes could crown rulers, so kings and the Church stayed joined in politics for centuries.

Give a long-term consequence

Link back to the question

For these reasons, the crowning of 800 CE was a turning point: its causes lay in the Frankish-Church alliance, and its consequences shaped how Europe was ruled.

Link back to the question

Notice the dates, the named people, and the cause-then-consequence shape.

A model paragraph about the crowning of Charlemagne, with each sentence colour-coded by its job

Notice the shape: scene → cause → cause → short-term consequence → long-term consequence → link back. Notice too the named people (Leo III, Charlemagne) and the dated facts (751, 800).

Example 2 — on your own

Task. Put the five steps of 1066 in order, then choose one consequence of the Norman invasion and explain how it changed England.

The five steps: (1) January 1066 — Edward dies and Harold Godwinson is crowned; (2) 25 September 1066 — Harold defeats Hardrada at Stamford Bridge; (3) 28 September 1066 — William lands in the south; (4) 14 October 1066 — William defeats Harold at the Battle of Hastings; (5) 25 December 1066 — William is crowned king. One consequence, explained: William gave England's great estates to Norman nobles. This changed England because power and wealth moved to a new, French-speaking group; castles rose to hold the land; and when the king needed to know what his new kingdom was worth, he ordered the Domesday survey of 1086, which still tells historians how England was owned and farmed.

Practice questions

Practice with help

Q1. Number these five events of the migration period from 1 (first in time) to 5 (last): the Lombards enter Italy; the Goths cross the river Danube; Alaric's Goths sack Rome; Clovis unites the Franks; Odoacer removes the last western Roman emperor. (Use the dated list in Theory part 1.)

Q2. Using the migrations diagram: (a) state two causes of the migrations; (b) state two outcomes for Europe.

Q3. About Charlemagne: (a) on what exact date was he crowned emperor, and by whom? (b) give one thing he did with his new power, and say whether it was a cause or a consequence of the crowning. (Use Theory part 2.)

Q4. The five dated steps of 1066 are listed in Theory part 3. Write them in your book in order, each with its date. (Hint: the dates are given; you only need the order and the event.)

Q5. Give two consequences of the Norman invasion that changed England for centuries, and say which of the three primary sources (Bayeux Tapestry, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Domesday Book) tells us about each one.

Q6. Copy and complete the Black Death chain using the word bank: **disease** → **deaths** → **fewer** _____ → **higher** _____ → _____ → **revolt** → **a weaker old** _____. Word bank: *laws, order, wages, workers*.

Practice on your own

Q7. Write four to six sentences explaining one cause and one consequence of Charlemagne being crowned emperor in 800 CE. Use the words *cause* and *consequence*, and include at least one date.

Q8. Read the population bar chart. Describe what happened to England's population between 1300 and 1400, and use Theory part 5 to explain the fall.

Q9. "The crowning of Charlemagne was a turning point." Do you agree? Give two reasons, using cause and consequence language, and say what changed after 800 CE.

Q10. Write a short paragraph (five or six sentences) explaining what caused the feudal order to form, and one impact it had on the peasants. Use the words *fief*, *vassal* and *serf*.

Source-based inquiry

Source A — Henry Knighton on the Black Death. Knighton was a monk at an abbey in Leicester, England. In the 1390s CE he wrote a chronicle of his times. The passage below is retold in simpler words from his Latin.

"In the year 1348 the plague came to England. In that same year the sheep died everywhere in great numbers, and one man could drive five thousand sheep in a single day. And after the plague there were so few workers and servants to be had that people did not know what to do. The survivors asked for very high wages. Those who had once worked for a little food would not now work at all unless they were paid highly."

Q11. (a) According to Knighton, what happened to the sheep, and what happened to the workers? (2 marks) (b) What does this source show about wages after the plague? (2 marks) (c) Give two reasons to be careful when using Knighton as evidence. (2 marks) (d) Name one other source from this section that could be checked against Knighton, and say what it adds. (2 marks)

Answers

Q1. 1 Goths cross the Danube (376); 2 Alaric's Goths sack Rome (410); 3 Odoacer removes the last western emperor (476); 4 Clovis unites the Franks (481–511); 5 Lombards enter Italy (568). **Q2.** (a) Any two of: the Huns pushing west; weaker Roman defences; the search for safer land, food and wealth. (b) Any two of: the western empire broke into kingdoms; languages, laws and customs blended; the Church carried reading, writing and organisation into the new kingdoms. **Q3.** (a) 25 December 800 CE, by Pope Leo III. (b) Example: he lifted learning (palace school at Aachen, monks copying old texts) — a consequence of the crowning. **Q4.** January 1066 Edward dies, Harold crowned; 25 September 1066 Stamford Bridge; 28 September 1066 William lands; 14 October 1066 Battle of Hastings; 25 December 1066 William crowned. **Q5.** Example: castles and Norman nobles taking the estates — Domesday Book (1086) records who held the land; the blending of languages — the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle shows English life before and after. The Bayeux Tapestry must be handled with care because it was made for the Norman side, the winners. **Q6.** disease → deaths → fewer **workers** → higher **wages** → **laws** → revolt → a weaker old **order**. **Q7.** See fully-worked solutions. **Q8.** Grew to about 5 million by 1300, then fell sharply to about 2.2 million by 1377 and about 2.1 million by 1400; cause: the Black Death from 1347. **Q9.** See fully-worked solutions. **Q10.** See fully-worked solutions. **Q11.** (a) Sheep died in great numbers; workers became scarce. (b) Surviving workers could ask for much higher wages. (c) Any two of: he wrote in the 1390s, decades after 1348; he was a monk at an abbey, writing from one point of view; his numbers (five thousand sheep) are hard to check. (d) Example: Jean de Venette's chronicle (1350s), written in France close to the time — it lets us check whether the same pattern (deaths, then scarce workers) shows up in another place.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. From the dated list: 376 Goths cross the Danube; 410 sack of Rome; 476 Odoacer removes the last western emperor; 481 Clovis unites the Franks; 568 Lombards enter Italy. So: 1 Danube, 2 sack of Rome, 3 Odoacer, 4 Clovis, 5 Lombards.

Q2. (a) Mark one for each cause named from the diagram's left column. (b) Mark one for each outcome named from the right column. Full sentences are not required, but "the Huns pushed west" is stronger than "Huns".

Q3. (a) Both parts needed for the mark: 25 December 800 CE, Pope Leo III. (b) One mark for the deed, one for correctly calling it a cause or a consequence. Setting up the palace school and lifting learning came *after* and *because* of Charlemagne's crowned power, so it is a consequence.

Q4. One mark per correctly placed step (5 marks). Dates must travel with their events: 14 October 1066 belongs to the Battle of Hastings, not the coronation.

Q5. One mark per consequence–source pair (2 pairs = 4 marks). The point of view question matters: the Bayeux Tapestry shows the Norman side of the story, so historians check it against the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Domesday Book.

Q6. workers; wages; laws; order. One mark per correct gap.

Q7. Marking guide (4 marks):

- Sets the scene with a correct dated fact (e.g. "On 25 December 800 CE, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor in Rome") — 1 mark.
- Gives one cause that actually worked (the Frankish–Church friendship since 751; Charlemagne's wars made him the strongest ruler; the pope needed a protector) — 1 mark.
- Gives one consequence that follows from the event (one ruler over most of western Europe; the lift in learning; popes crowning rulers for centuries after) — 1 mark.
- Uses the words *cause* and *consequence* correctly — 1 mark.

Model answer: On 25 December 800 CE, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, king of the Franks, as emperor in Rome. One cause was that popes and Frankish kings had been friends since 751 CE, when Pepin was anointed, and Charlemagne's long wars had made him the strongest ruler in western Europe. One consequence was that Charlemagne used his new standing to lift learning, with monks copying old texts at centres like Aachen. In the longer

run, the crowning set a pattern in which popes crowned rulers, so the Church and the crown stayed joined in politics for centuries.

Q8. Marking guide (4 marks): describes growth to about 5 million by 1300 (1); describes the fall to about 2 million by 1400 (1); names the Black Death from 1347 as the cause (1); links deaths to the fall in numbers, e.g. “between about a third and a half of people died” (1). Note the chart’s own warning: the bars are historians’ estimates, and they vary.

Q9. Marking guide (4 marks): states a clear position (1); gives two reasons using cause/consequence language (2); names something that changed after 800 CE, such as one ruler over most of western Europe, the lift in learning, or popes crowning rulers (1). A strong “agree” answer: causes lay in the Frankish–Church friendship and the pope’s need for a protector; consequences — one ruler over most of western Europe, and a lasting pattern of popes crowning rulers — mean Europe was ruled in new ways after 800, which is what a turning point is. A thoughtful answer that agrees in part is welcome if it reasons well, for example by noting that the empire was split again by 843, so some consequences did not last.

Q10. Marking guide (5 marks):

- Gives at least one cause of the feudal order (the split of Charlemagne’s empire after 843; Viking, Magyar and Muslim attacks; kings too weak to defend every village; land as the main form of wealth) — 1 mark each, up to 2.
- Explains one impact on the peasants (hard work, rents and the tithe, few freedoms, serfs tied to the land) — 1 mark.
- Uses *fief* correctly (land granted in return for service) — 1 mark.
- Uses *vassal* correctly (a lord who swears loyalty to the monarch in return for a fief) or *serf* correctly (an unfree worker tied to the land) — 1 mark.

Model answer: After 843 CE Charlemagne’s empire was split, and kings grew too weak to defend every village against Viking ships and Magyar riders. Because land was the main form of wealth, rulers paid for service with land, granting each fief to a lord who became their vassal and promised loyalty in return. Local lords built castles and kept fighting men, and the peasants on their land paid the price: rents, the tithe, and for many, serfdom, tied to the land with the lord’s leave needed even to move. For the peasants, the feudal order brought protection but very little freedom.

Q11. Marking guide (8 marks total):

- - (a) One mark for the sheep dying in great numbers; one mark for workers becoming scarce (2).
- - (b) Needs the wage claim: surviving workers could ask for much higher pay, and some would not work at all without it (2).
- - (c) One mark per valid caution, up to 2: written in the 1390s, decades after 1348, from memory and report; written by a monk at one abbey, with one point of view; big round numbers like “five thousand sheep” are hard to check; he is describing England, not all of Europe.
- - (d) One mark for naming a real source from this section (Jean de Venette’s chronicle; the population estimates; the laws of 1349 and 1351); one mark for saying what it adds — e.g. de Venette shows the same pattern of deaths and scarce workers in France, written close to the time, so Knighton’s English picture can be checked against another place.

Rulers and ruled in medieval Europe: lives, power and authority

TEACHER-FACING METADATA – NOT STUDENT TEXT (the vocabulary gate excludes this block)

Section 3C – Chapter 3 – Strand: Historical Knowledge and Understanding
Sub-strand: Investigation: Europe and the Mediterranean world (c. 600-1750 CE)
Depth topic: Medieval Europe (TOC D7)
Owns: VC2HH8K21 (stem: "Students learn about:") – code only; curriculum wording is not reproduced (VC2 codes-only ruling, DJB 16/10/2026).

Draws on (all 15 elaboration ids, VCAA export order; per TOC D7
only the Medieval-Europe-labeled elaborations are taught – E04-E15 are the
unchosen menu topics' linkage keys, NOT taught):

- .E01 what the Black Death did to daily life, read through primary sources (Villani's diary and Boccaccio's Decameron, the chronicle of John of Fordun, Ibn Khaldun's recollection) [MEDIEVAL EUROPE – TAUGHT]
- .E02 why different groups faced different punishments – combat as a noble privilege, ducking stools for women – and deterrence as a goal [MEDIEVAL EUROPE – TAUGHT]
- .E03 how rulers answered lower-class demands for better working conditions and lives after the plague (e.g. the Statute of Labourers, 1351) [MEDIEVAL EUROPE – TAUGHT]
- .E04 [The Ottoman Empire – linkage key only, not taught]
- .E05 [Ottoman – linkage key only]
- .E06 [Ottoman – linkage key only]
- .E07 [Vikings – linkage key only]
- .E08 [Vikings – linkage key only]
- .E09 [Vikings – linkage key only]
- .E10 [Renaissance Italy – linkage key only]
- .E11 [Renaissance Italy – linkage key only]
- .E12 [The Spanish and the Americas – linkage key only]
- .E13 [Spanish and the Americas – linkage key only]
- .E14 [Emergence of the modern world – linkage key only]
- .E15 [Emergence of the modern world – linkage key only]

First Nations disposition: none – no VC2HH8K21 elaboration carries a section 2A exclusion; nothing excluded is taught or referenced here.

Contested-term handling (CONTESTED_TERMS.md Rule 1/1b/5): the CD uses "power" and "authority" without defining either. The section's teaching sequence states up front that both are contested terms, gives the operational definitions the section uses, and notes other definitions exist; every task is answerable on those definitions alone. Steelman (Rule 5) and symmetry (Rule 4) are applied to the two perspectives on the Statute of Labourers (Worked example 2, figure 3c_two_views.png, Q8) and to the deterrence debate (Q10); marking guidance awards the reasoning, not the conclusion reached.

Source lines for real-world data (TOC D4/D12), all checked 24 August 2026 against the named English Wikipedia articles (accessed via WebFetch on that date):

- Black Death: arrived by ship in Sicily October 1347; galleys from Kaffa reached Genoa and Venice January 1348; Marseille struck late January 1348; France by June 1348; England June 1348, first in coastal towns of Dorset; Scotland and Scandinavia 1348-1350; caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, spread chiefly by flea bites (fleas on black rats),

later person-to-person; estimated 25-50 million dead, "30% to 60% of the European population" (article "Black Death").

- Matteo Villani (1283-1363), Italian historian of Florence, brother of Giovanni Villani; after Giovanni died (in the 1348 plague) Matteo extended the Nuova Cronica by eleven books; his treatment of the 1348 plague is of "particular importance"; he died in a plague epidemic in 1363 (article "Matteo Villani"). VCAA calls this source "Matteo Villani's diary"; it is a chronicle (year-by-year record), and the section keeps VCAA's naming while teaching what a chronicle is.
- Giovanni Boccaccio, born 16 June 1313 (Certaldo or Florence), died 21 December 1375 at Certaldo; the Decameron was written between 1348 and 1353: a hundred tales told by ten young people (seven women, three men) who leave plague-stricken Florence for a country retreat; the plague killed his father's wife; whether Boccaccio himself stayed in Florence through 1348 is uncertain (articles "Giovanni Boccaccio", "The Decameron").
- Florence's urban population before the plague may have been as great as 120,000; the 1348 plague reduced it by over half (article "Florence").
- John of Fordun, Scottish chronicler (fl. before 1360 - c. 1384); his Chronica Gentis Scotorum (Chronicle of the Scottish Nation), in five books, was published around 1360 and is the first substantial work of Scottish history; Walter Bower continued Fordun's history to 1437 as the Scotichronicon (articles "John of Fordun", "Chronica Gentis Scotorum"). The plague reached Scotland in 1349 (article "Scotland in the Late Middle Ages"); the Black Death article gives Scotland and Scandinavia 1348-1350. Honesty note: Fordun's own plague passage could not be verified in this environment, so the section quotes no words to him; it teaches the source through its features, content and context, and the verified dates for Scotland.
- Ibn Khaldun, born 27 May 1332 in Tunis, died 17 March 1406 in Cairo; author of the Muqaddimah; wrote an autobiography; the plague hit Tunis in 1348-1349 and killed both his parents and some of his teachers (article "Ibn Khaldun").
- Ordinance of Labourers: royal assent and commencement 18 June 1349; bound those "able in body, and within the age of threescore years" (under 60) to work when required; wages capped at customary pay of Edward III's twentieth regnal year (1346-7) or nearby earlier years; breach brought imprisonment and fines, sometimes doubled or tripled; the Statute of Labourers 1351 strengthened it; workers nevertheless kept getting higher wages (article "Ordinance of Labourers").
- Statute of Labourers 1351: set a maximum wage tied to pre-plague customary pay; compelled the able-bodied poor to serve; refusal brought imprisonment, stocks, fines; poorly enforced; angered workers and helped cause the Peasants' Revolt (article "Statute of Labourers").
- Peasants' Revolt 1381: caused by post-Black Death resentment, wartime taxation including the poll tax, and the Statute of Labourers' wage rules; leaders Wat Tyler and John Ball; rebels entered London, destroyed the Savoy Palace, took the Tower of London, killed royal officials; Richard II met the rebels at Mile End and made concessions; Wat Tyler was killed at Smithfield; the revolt was put down, charters revoked, serfdom not ended, at least 1,500 rebels killed (article "Peasants' Revolt").
- Trial by combat: appeared in England following the Norman Conquest; its chief early users were aristocrats entitled to bear arms; by about 1300 it had all but died out as jury decisions replaced it; after Ashford v Thornton (1818) Parliament abolished wager of battle the following year (1819) (article "Trial by combat").

- Ducking/cucking stools: punishment chairs, sometimes used to dunk the victim in water; chiefly for "disorderly women, scolds" and also dishonest tradesmen; instruments of public humiliation; English records reach back to the medieval era, the older term "cucking" from about 1215, "ducking" first attested in English in 1597 (article "Ducking stool").

Vocabulary gate (TOC D2, ceiling Yr7): all student-facing text of this section – prose, tables, figure alt texts, questions, answers – plus the visible strings inside the `fig_3c_*.py` generator scripts, gate run at `src/gate_3c.py`; exemptions = curriculum's own words (CD + E01-E03), subject terms defined at first use in the section, and proper nouns. "medieval" is exempt as the curriculum's own topic label ("Medieval Europe" in the VCAA export; also the mandated section title).

Model images (SOURCE_USE Rule 3): every figure in this section is an original drawing made for this book by the scripts in `src/`. None reproduces any medieval manuscript, and none is itself a primary source.

Volume (TOC calibration): one teaching sequence; two worked examples; six practice-with-help tasks (Q1-Q6); four practice-on-your-own tasks (Q7-Q10); one source-based inquiry task (the Decameron source task).

Teaching sequence

Two words that carry this section: power and authority

The Victorian Curriculum uses the words *power* and *authority* in the content description for this section, but it does not define either one. Both words are *contested* — that is, even careful thinkers still argue about their exact meanings, and the definition you pick can change what you conclude. So this section says plainly which definitions it uses. Every question here can be answered from these definitions alone.

- **Power** — being able to make people do things, even when they would rather not. An army that takes a town by force has power.
- **Authority** — a right to give orders that people accept. A king's letter is obeyed because most people accept the king's right to rule.

Power and authority: the definitions this section uses

Both words are contested - careful thinkers still argue about their exact meanings.

POWER

what it means

being able to make people do things, even when they would rather not

for example

an army that takes a town by force has power

AUTHORITY

what it means

a right to give orders that people accept

for example

a king's letter is obeyed because most people accept the king's right to rule

Other definitions exist. Every question in this section can be answered from these two definitions alone.

Two word cards on a plain background. The POWER card says being able to make people do things, even when they would rather not, with the example an army that takes a town by force has power. The AUTHORITY card says a right to give orders that people accept, with the example a king's letter is obeyed because most people accept the king's right to rule. A strip below says both words are contested, other definitions exist, and this section uses the two definitions shown.

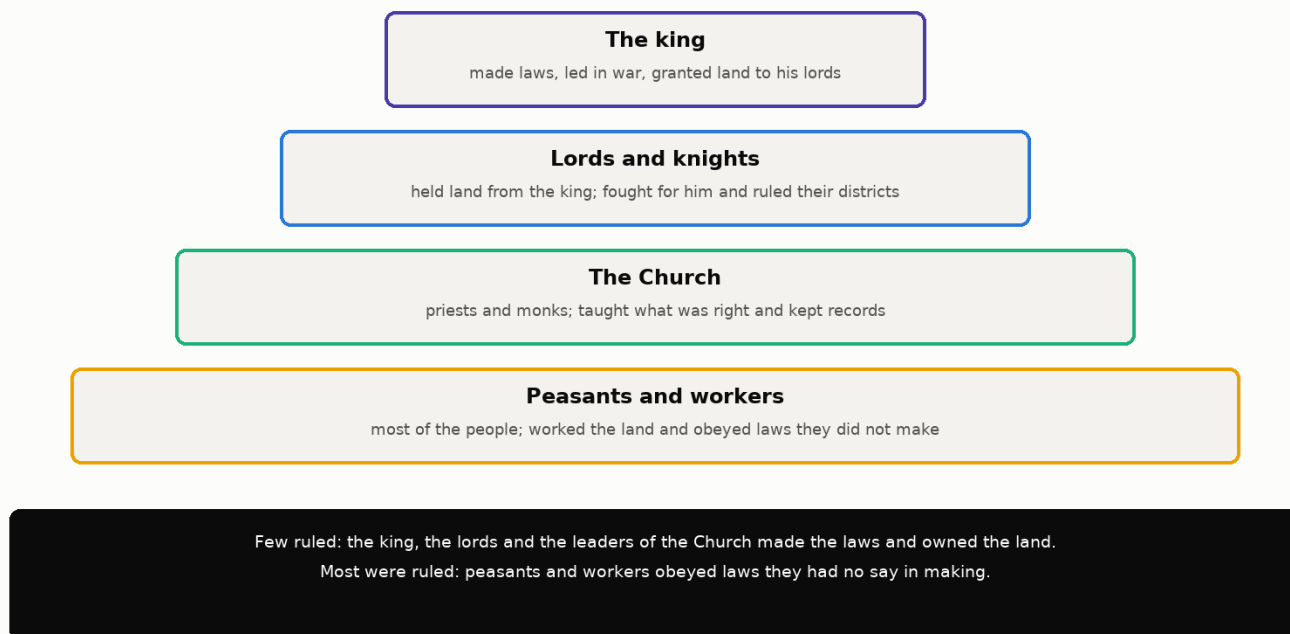
The strongest rule holds both: the authority to give orders, *and* the power to make them happen. In medieval Europe, kings, lords and the Church held most of both. Most other people — the ruled — held little of either. This section asks what that felt like from each side, and what happened when a disaster shook the whole arrangement.

Who ruled, and who was ruled

Medieval Europe was organised around the holding of land. Historians call this arrangement **feudalism**: the king granted land to his lords; lords granted parts of their land to lesser lords and **knights** (mounted fighters who served their lord); and at the bottom, **peasants** (poor farmers who worked the land for their lord) laboured in the fields in return for protection and a place to live. Everyone owed someone; almost no one owned their own ground.

Who ruled, and who was ruled, in medieval Europe

Society was organised around the holding of land - historians call this arrangement feudalism.



A layered diagram of medieval society. At the top sits the king, then a thin band of lords and knights who held the land and led in war, then the Church with its priests and monks, and below them the widest band, peasants and workers, most of the people, who had little say in the laws they obeyed. A note at the side says few ruled, most were ruled, and names the arrangement feudalism.

Few ruled. Most were ruled. The king, the lords and the leaders of the Church made the laws, owned most of the land and led in war. Below them, most people were peasants and workers: farmers, servants, builders and tradespeople. They obeyed the laws but had almost no say in making them.

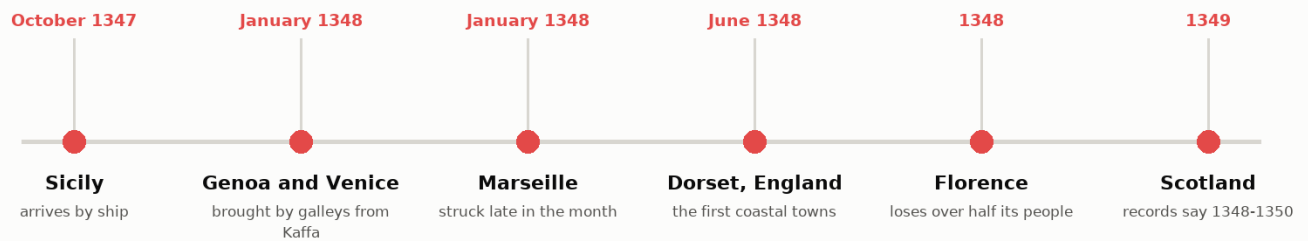
The Church was an authority in its own right, not just a helper of kings. It taught what was right, kept records, and its words were obeyed in matters of faith. Kings were often said to rule by God's will — an idea that made their authority feel part of the order of the world itself.

A disaster arrives: the Black Death

In 1347 a sickness began to move along the sea routes of Europe. Historians call it the **Black Death**: the plague that swept through Europe between 1347 and 1351. It was caused by a germ called *Yersinia pestis*, carried chiefly by fleas that lived on black rats — rats that travelled on ships and thrived in towns. Once the sickness took hold in a town, it also passed from person to person.

The Black Death moves along the sea routes, 1347-1350

The germ *Yersinia pestis* travelled with fleas on black rats - rats that sailed on ships and thrived in towns.



A sick person could die within days. Historians estimate that 30 to 60 out of every 100 people in Europe died - perhaps up to 50 million lives. Whole villages were left almost empty.

A timeline map strip from 1347 to 1350. October 1347, the plague arrives by ship in Sicily. January 1348, it reaches Genoa and Venice by galley, and Marseille soon after. June 1348, it lands in England at the coastal towns of Dorset. 1348, Florence loses more than half its people. 1349, it reaches Scotland. A note below says historians estimate that 30 to 60 out of every 100 people in Europe died, perhaps up to 50 million lives.

The plague travelled fast. It reached Sicily by ship in October 1347. By January 1348 galleys brought it to Genoa and Venice, and it struck Marseille soon after. It landed in England in June 1348, first in the coastal towns of Dorset. It burned through Florence in 1348, and it reached Scotland in 1349 (some records place it between 1348 and 1350). A sick person could die within days, running a fever, with swellings under the skin and dark marks on the body.

Historians estimate that 30 to 60 out of every 100 people in Europe died — perhaps up to 50 million lives. Florence, a city of perhaps 120,000 people, lost more than half of them. Whole villages were left almost empty.

Four voices from the plague years

Most people in medieval Europe could not write. So who tells us what these years were like? The voices that survive chiefly belong to educated people who lived near wealth and power. Four named sources stand out — two from Florence, one from Scotland, one from Tunis, on the far side of the Mediterranean. All four are **primary sources**: they come from people who lived through the plague years, or close to them.

Four voices from the plague years

All four are primary sources: they come from people who lived through the plague years, or close to them.

Matteo Villani

Florence

kept a chronicle - a history written year by year. His brother Giovanni died in the plague of 1348; Matteo took up the work and added eleven more books. He died in a second wave of plague in 1363.

Giovanni Boccaccio

Florence

wrote the Decameron, 1348-1353: one hundred stories told by ten young people - seven women and three men - who leave plague-hit Florence to keep safe. The plague killed his father's wife.

John of Fordun

Scotland

gave Scotland the first great book of its history, the Chronicle of the Scottish Nation; its first five books were finished about 1360. The plague reached Scotland in 1349.

Ibn Khaldun

Tunis

one of the great historians of the medieval world. In the story of his own life he recalled the plague years: it struck Tunis in 1348-1349 and killed his parents and some of his teachers.

These voices survive because their writers were educated and lived near wealth and power.

Most people of the time could not write, so their own words rarely survive.

Four source cards. Card A, Matteo Villani, Florence, a chronicle kept year by year through and after 1348, later eleven more books; he died in a second wave of plague in 1363. Card B, Giovanni Boccaccio, Florence, a book of one hundred stories called the Decameron, written 1348 to 1353, told by ten young people who leave plague-hit Florence. Card C, John of Fordun, Scotland, the Chronicle of the Scottish Nation, the first great book of Scottish history, its first five books finished around 1360; the plague reached Scotland in 1349. Card D, Ibn Khaldun, Tunis in North Africa, the story of his own life; the plague struck Tunis in 1348 to 1349 and killed his parents and some of his teachers.

Matteo Villani (1283–1363) kept a **chronicle** — a record of events written year by year — for the city of Florence. When the plague struck in 1348 it killed his brother Giovanni, who had been writing the city's history; Matteo took up the work and added eleven more books. His account of life in Florence during and after the plague is one of the clearest we have. He died himself in a second wave of plague in 1363.

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) was a writer of Florence. Between 1348 and 1353 he wrote the *Decameron*: one hundred stories told, inside the book, by ten young people — seven women and three men — who leave plague-stricken Florence to keep themselves safe. The book opens with a famous description of the plague and the way the city fell apart. Boccaccio lived through those years — the plague killed his father's wife — but historians are not certain he stayed in Florence through 1348, and the stories themselves are invented. The *Decameron* is a rich source, and a source that must be read with care.

John of Fordun (alive and writing before 1360; died around 1384) gave Scotland the first great book of its history: the *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, known in English as the *Chronicle of the Scottish Nation*. Chronicles record events year by year, and Scotland's year-by-year records cover the time the plague reached Scotland — most historians place its arrival there in 1349. Later writers carried Fordun's work forward to 1437.

Ibn Khaldun (born in Tunis in 1332; died in Cairo in 1406) became one of the great historians of the medieval world. In the story he later wrote of his own life, he recalled the plague years. The plague struck Tunis in 1348–1349. It killed both his parents and some of his teachers. His writing shows the same disaster seen from the other side of the sea — this chapter's world was Europe *and* the Mediterranean.

Four sources: what each can show, and what to check

No one voice shows the whole picture. Historians set sources side by side.

Source	What it can show	What to check
Villani's chronicle	how people in Florence lived, worked and behaved in and after 1348	he sees the city from a rich man's desk
Boccaccio's Decameron	the feel of the city, and how people behaved under fear	the stories are invented, and he may not have been in the city through 1348
Fordun's Chronicle	Scotland's record year by year as the plague arrived	it chiefly tracks kings and church leaders, not peasants
Ibn Khaldun's own story	the plague in North Africa, through one man's losses	it is one person's memory of his own family and teachers

Each source shows some things and hides others. Weighing them is the skill you build in Sections 5C-5E.

A four-row table, one row per source, with columns what it can show and what to check. Villani can show how people in Florence lived, worked and behaved in and after 1348; check that he sees the city from a rich man's desk. Boccaccio can show the feel of the city and how people behaved under fear; check that the stories are invented and he may not have been in the city through 1348. Fordun's chronicle can show Scotland's record year by year as the plague arrived; check that it chiefly records kings and church leaders, not peasants. Ibn Khaldun can show the plague in North Africa through one man's losses; check that it is one person's memory of his own family and teachers. A note below says historians put sources side by side, the skill built in Sections 5C to 5E.

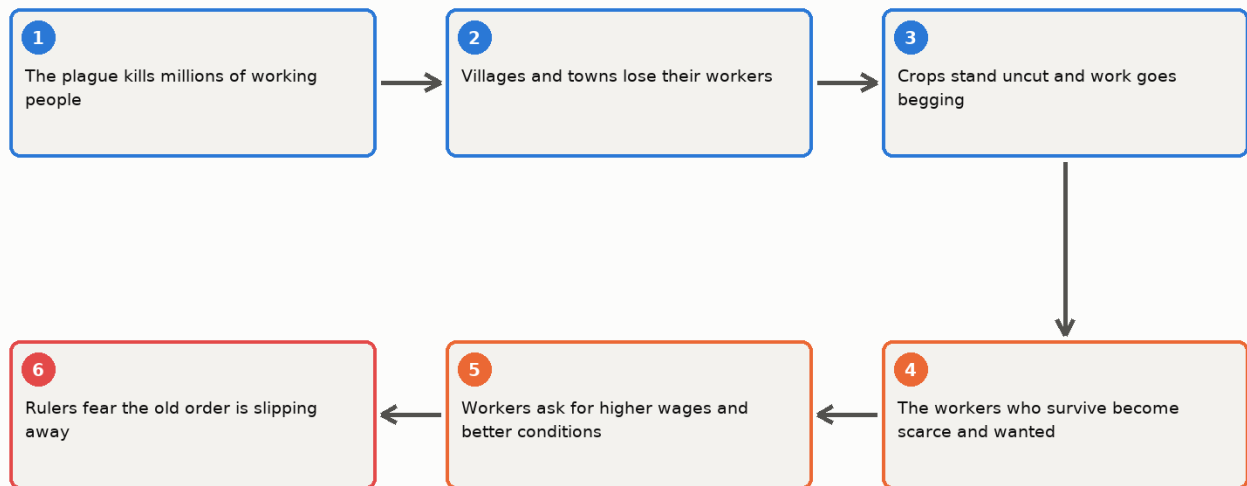
No one voice shows the whole picture. Villani watched from a rich man's desk. Boccaccio gives us the feel of the city but invents his stories. Fordun's chronicle keeps the Scottish record year by year, but chronicles chiefly track kings and church leaders, not peasants. Ibn Khaldun shows us the disaster through his own losses. Historians set such sources side by side and ask what each can — and cannot — show. That is the skill you build in Sections 5C to 5E.

When workers became scarce

The plague changed the balance between rulers and ruled, and it did so through a chain of causes and consequences. When so many working people died, there were too few hands left to do the work. Crops stood uncut in the fields. The workers who survived found that their labour was worth more than it had ever been — and they began to ask for higher wages and better conditions.

From disaster to demands: a chain of causes and consequences

Each box is a cause of the next. Follow the arrows.



The chain did not stop there: rulers answered with the labour laws of 1349 and 1351 - see the next heading.

A chain of six boxes joined by arrows. The plague kills millions of working people. Villages and towns lose their workers. Crops stand uncut and work goes begging. The workers who survive become scarce and wanted. Workers ask for higher wages and better conditions. Rulers fear the old order is slipping away.

The rulers answer: the labour laws

In England, King Edward III's government answered the workers' demands with law. On 18 June 1349 it issued the **Ordinance of Labourers** — an ordinance was a royal order with the force of law. In 1351 **parliament** (the council that made laws with the king) made the rules stronger as the **Statute of Labourers** — a statute is a formal written law. The rules said:

- **Wages were frozen.** No worker was to be paid more than before the plague — the customary pay of the king's twentieth year on the throne (1346–7), or the years just around it.
- **Work could not be refused.** Everyone under 60, able in body and without land or a trade of their own, had to work for whoever hired them.
- **Breaking the law was punished.** Refusing work, or asking for more pay, brought prison, the stocks, or fines — doubled or tripled if it happened again.

The rulers answer: the labour laws of 1349 and 1351

King Edward III's government answered the workers' demands with law.

Ordinance of Labourers

a royal order with the force of law - 18 June 1349

- wages frozen at pre-plague levels: the custom of 1346-47
- anyone under 60, without land or a trade of their own, must work for whoever hires them
- refusing work brings prison or fines

Statute of Labourers

a formal written law made by parliament - 1351

- the same rules, made stronger
- fines could be doubled or tripled for repeat breaking
- officials hunted down workers who asked for more

The law was badly kept: there were too few workers to do without, and many still found ways to earn more.

The anger built - it helped cause the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

Two law cards on one panel. The first card, the Ordinance of Labourers, 18 June 1349, lists wages frozen at pre-plague levels, work cannot be refused by anyone under 60 without land or a trade, and refusal brings prison or fines. The second card, the Statute of Labourers, 1351, says parliament strengthened the same rules, fines could double or triple, and officials hunted down workers who asked for more. A strip below says the law was badly kept, workers kept finding ways to earn more, and the anger helped cause the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

The law was badly kept — there were too few workers to do without, and many still found ways to earn more. But the message was clear: the rulers meant to hold the old order in place, whatever the plague had changed. The anger built. It helped cause the **Peasants' Revolt** of 1381, when rebels led by Wat Tyler and John Ball marched on London; King Richard II met them and made promises, the promises were broken, Tyler was killed, and at least 1,500 rebels died. Section 3B takes up the great events of medieval Europe; here the revolt stands as one consequence of the rulers' answer.

Whose voices survive?

Notice whose voices you have just heard: rich, educated men — a banker's brother, a famous writer, chroniclers, a scholar. The ruled majority — peasants, servants, workers — chiefly could not write, so their own words rarely survive. Historians read across that gap: court records, lists of wages, and even laws like the Statute of Labourers. A law made *against* workers demanding more pay tells us, in the rulers' own words, that workers were demanding more pay. Sources speak even when their makers did not mean them to.

Whose voices survive?

The people you have heard from in this section were all rich, educated men.

Voices that survive

- the writers of our four sources
- rich, educated, chiefly men
- close to wealth and power

The ruled majority

- peasants, servants and workers
- most could not write
- their own words rarely survive

Historians read across the gap: court records, wage lists and laws let the ruled be heard.
Even a law made against workers demanding more pay tells us, in the rulers' own words,
that workers were demanding more pay. Sources speak even when their makers did not mean them to.

A two-column diagram titled whose voices survive. The left column lists the writers of the four sources, rich, educated, chiefly men, close to wealth and power. The right column lists the ruled majority, peasants, servants and workers, most unable to write, whose own words rarely survive. Below, a strip says historians read across the gap, court records, wage lists and laws like the Statute of Labourers let the ruled be heard, even laws made against them say what they demanded.

Punishment: different rules for different groups

Power and authority showed in another way too: in how people were punished. Medieval courts did not punish everyone the same. Your place in society shaped what happened to you.

Punishment by social group in medieval Europe

Courts did not punish everyone the same. Your place in society shaped what happened to you.

Group	Punishment	What it was	Why it differed
Nobles	trial by combat	two sides fought - or found fighters - and the winner was taken to have proved their case; brought to England with the Norman invasion of 1066	a privilege chiefly for nobles; most other people faced juries; it faded out by about 1300
Nobles sentenced to die	beheading	death by the sword	seen as fitting a great rank; a commoner was hanged instead
Commoners	hanging, or fines	the usual punishments for serious crimes	no privileges of rank to fall back on
Townsfolk	the stocks and the pillory	wooden frames that locked the hands, feet or head in the market place	public shame: all could watch and shout
Women accused of scolding	the ducking stool	a chair fixed to a long pole, paraded through the town and sometimes dunked in water	used chiefly against women accused of angry talk, and sometimes against dishonest shopkeepers

Most punishments were public on purpose: watching was meant to warn everyone else - punishment as a deterrent.

The right to punish was one of the clearest signs of who held power.

A table of punishments by social group with columns group, punishment, what it was, and why it differed. Nobles could claim trial by combat, a fight to decide a case brought to England with the Norman invasion of 1066, chiefly for nobles, while most others faced juries. Nobles sentenced to die were beheaded with a sword, a death seen as fitting a great rank, while commoners were hanged. Commoners faced hanging or fines as the usual punishment for serious crimes. Townsfolk faced the stocks and the pillory, wooden frames that locked the body in the market place as public shame. Women accused of scolding faced the ducking stool, a chair paraded through town and sometimes dunked in water. A strip below says most punishments were public on purpose: watching was meant to warn everyone else, punishment worked as a deterrent, and the right to punish showed who held power.

- **Trial by combat** came to England with the Norman invasion of 1066. Two sides in a quarrel fought — or found fighters to fight for them — and the winner was taken to have proved their case. In time it became a privilege chiefly for nobles, men entitled to bear arms. For most common people, courts used juries instead. Trial by combat faded out by about 1300 — but it stayed on the books in England until 1819.
- **A noble condemned to death was beheaded**, with a sword. **A commoner was hanged**. One death was seen as fitting a great rank; the other was not.
- **Townsfolk** who broke the law faced the **stocks** (wooden frames that locked the hands and feet) or the **pillory** — a frame that locked the head and hands in the market place, open to the crowd's mockery.
- **The ducking stool** was a chair fixed to the end of a long pole. The person was tied in, paraded through the town, and sometimes dunked in a pond or stream. It was used chiefly against women accused of being a **scold** — that is, of angry talk that stirred up quarrels — and sometimes against dishonest shopkeepers. English records go back to medieval times: the older word *cucking* appears in records from about

Why such public punishments? Most punishment happened in the open, because rulers used it as a **deterrent** — a warning. Watching someone punished was meant to put everyone else off doing the same. Public punishment also showed who held power: the right to punish was one of the clearest signs of authority. Notice, though, whose punishments were gentler. The same society that ducked women for their talk let nobles settle their cases by the sword.

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help: reading a source for the plague years

Describe Matteo Villani's chronicle as a source for daily life during the Black Death, under the headings *features*, *content*, *context*.

Heading	Description	How we know
Features	A chronicle — a history written year by year. A primary source, written by Matteo Villani (1283–1363), a man of Florence who lived through the plague years. He took up the work after his brother Giovanni died in the plague of 1348, and added eleven more books.	The chronicle itself survives; Villani's life is recorded by historians of Florence.
Content	Life in Florence during and after the plague of 1348: how the city suffered, and how survivors lived, worked and behaved in the years that followed.	That is what his part of the chronicle sets out to record.
Context	Florence lost more than half of its people (from perhaps 120,000 before the plague). Workers became scarce and wages rose; rulers moved to hold the old order in place. Villani died in a second wave of plague in 1363 — the sickness came back.	City records and other sources of the time, including the plague's return across Europe in later years.

One sentence that joins all three: *Written year by year by a rich Florentine who lived through the disaster and died in its return, this chronicle shows the plague years from near the top of the city — which is both its strength and its limit.*

Example 2 — with help: two perspectives on the Statute of Labourers

Explain the Statute of Labourers (1351) from two perspectives. Give each side its strongest case before you weigh them. The figure below sets out both cases in their strongest form.

Two views of the Statute of Labourers (1351)

Each side is set out in its strongest form before we weigh them.

A lord with great lands

FOR the law

Wages were climbing fast, and prices with them. If each worker asks what they like, bread gets dearer for the poorest families. Holding pay at the old level keeps the fields worked and life steady for everyone.

A farm worker

AGAINST the law

Our numbers are few and the work is the same. The law forces us to work for the old pay while the cost of living climbs. Asking for a fair wage when workers are scarce is not greed - it is the only power we have.

The steelman test: give each side its strongest case before you weigh them.

Marking rewards the quality of your reasoning, not the side you reach.

Two view cards side by side. The left card speaks for a lord with great lands, for the law: wages and prices were climbing fast, holding pay at the old level keeps bread affordable and the fields worked, and order holds for everyone. The right card speaks for a farm worker, against the law: our numbers are few and the work is the same, the law freezes our pay while prices climb, and asking for a fair wage when workers are scarce is the only power workers have. A strip below gives the steelman test: give each side its strongest case before weighing them, and marking rewards the reasoning, not the side reached.

Perspective	Its strongest case	What the case rests on
A lord with great lands	The rules keep order for everyone. With so few workers left, wages were climbing fast, and prices with them. If each worker asks what they like, bread gets dearer for the poorest families. Holding wages at the old level keeps the fields worked and life steady.	The fear of rising prices; the need to get crops in.
A farm worker	The rules hold us down. Our numbers are few and the work is the same. The law forces us to work for the old pay while the cost of living climbs. Asking for a fair wage when workers are scarce is not greed — it is the only power we have.	The scarcity of workers; the frozen wage against rising prices.

A historian hears both cases, then asks: *who made this law, and who gained from it?* The law was made by the king and parliament — men of property — and it held wages down for the benefit of those who paid them. That does not make the lord's case false; it tells you where to look hardest.

Note on marking: in tasks like this you are marked on the quality of your reasoning, not on the side you finish on. Two answers reaching opposite conclusions can both be excellent.

Practice tasks

Practice with help

Q1. Power or authority? Sort each case into *power*, *authority*, or *both*: (a) a king's letter orders a town to pay a tax; (b) an army takes a town by force; (c) people obey the Church's teaching because they accept it as right; (d) robbers force people on the road to hand over their money; (e) a lord threatens to burn a village unless it works his fields; (f) a court speaks in the king's name, and its word is law.

Q2. Put the plague's arrivals in order, first to last, and give each its date: Scotland; Sicily; Genoa and Venice; the coastal towns of Dorset in England; Marseille.

Q3. Match each source to its place, then say one thing it can show us: Matteo Villani's chronicle; Boccaccio's *Decameron*; Fordun's *Chronicle of the Scottish Nation*; Ibn Khaldun's account of his own life. Places: Florence (twice), Scotland, Tunis.

Q4. The six boxes in the plague-effects chain are printed below, mixed up. Put them in order, from cause to last consequence. (a) Workers ask for higher wages and better conditions. (b) Crops stand uncut and work goes begging. (c) Rulers fear the old order is slipping away. (d) The plague kills millions of working people. (e) The workers who survive become scarce and wanted. (f) Villages and towns lose their workers.

Q5. The labour laws. (a) Name the two laws of 1349 and 1351 and say what each one was (an ordinance, a statute). (b) List the three rules described in this section. (c) For each rule, say who it helped and who it hurt.

Q6. Punishments. (a) Copy the punishment table and fill in the group column for: trial by combat; beheading; hanging; the stocks and the pillory; the ducking stool. (b) What is a deterrent? (c) Give two reasons why rulers made punishments public.

Practice on your own

Q7. "No single source can show the whole experience of the Black Death." Choose two of the four sources in this section and explain this claim, using what each source can — and cannot — show.

Q8. Write the strongest case a lord with great lands could make *for* the Statute of Labourers, and the strongest case a farm worker could make *against* it — two or three sentences each, each in its strongest form. Then say which case you find stronger, and why. You are marked on your reasoning, not on your side.

Q9. Choose **one** voice and write a diary entry of about 80 words: either a farm worker in England in 1351 hearing the new law read out, or a person in Florence in 1349 whose family has survived the plague. Use at least two facts from this section, and mark your entry clearly as an invented piece based on what you have learned.

Q10. Rulers made punishments public to warn people off crime. Give the strongest case that this kept order, and the strongest case that it chiefly held down the poor. Then answer: do harsh, public punishments stop crime? Set out your reasoning, and say what evidence would test your answer.

Source task — a storybook as evidence?

Read the source card, then answer the questions.

The *Decameron*, by Giovanni Boccaccio Written between 1348 and 1353. One hundred stories, told inside the book by ten young people — seven women and three men — who leave plague-stricken Florence to keep safe. The stories are invented. Boccaccio lived through the plague years, and the plague killed his father's wife; historians are not certain whether he himself stayed in Florence through 1348.

- (a) Is the *Decameron* a primary source, a secondary source, or hard to fit into either? Give your reasons.
- (b) What can an invented story show historians about the plague years that a law or a record of wages might not?
- (c) What should a historian check before using the *Decameron* as evidence about the plague itself?
- (d) Compare: in one way, how is the *Decameron* like Villani's chronicle as evidence — and in one way, how is it unlike it?

Answers

- Q1.** (a) authority; (b) power; (c) authority; (d) power; (e) power; (f) both — the court's authority comes from the king's name, backed by the power to punish.
- Q2.** Sicily (October 1347); Genoa and Venice (January 1348); Marseille (late January 1348); the coastal towns of Dorset in England (June 1348); Scotland (1349, with records ranging 1348–1350).
- Q3.** Villani — Florence: daily life in and after the plague, seen from a rich man's desk. Boccaccio — Florence: the feel of the city under fear, in invented stories. Fordun — Scotland: the year-by-year record as the plague reached Scotland. Ibn Khaldun — Tunis: the plague in North Africa, through one man's losses of his parents and teachers.
- Q4.** (d) The plague kills millions of working people → (f) Villages and towns lose their workers → (b) Crops stand uncut and work goes begging → (e) The workers who survive become scarce and wanted → (a) Workers ask for higher wages and better conditions → (c) Rulers fear the old order is slipping away.
- Q5.** (a) The Ordinance of Labourers, a royal order with the force of law, 18 June 1349; the Statute of Labourers, a formal written law made by parliament, 1351. (b) Wages frozen at pre-plague levels (the custom of 1346–7); everyone under 60 without land or a trade must work for whoever hires them; refusing work or asking for more brings prison, the stocks, or fines, doubled or tripled on repeat. (c) The frozen wage helped those who paid wages (lords and employers) and hurt workers; forced labour helped landowners keep crops going and hurt workers' freedom to choose; the punishments protected the rules and fell on workers who broke them.
- Q6.** (a) Trial by combat — nobles; beheading — nobles condemned to die; hanging — commoners; stocks and pillory — townsfolk; ducking stool — chiefly women accused of being a scold. (b) A deterrent is a warning: a punishment meant to stop other people doing the same thing. (c) Any two of: to warn everyone watching; to show who held power and authority; because courts had no prisons to hold people for long, so shame and pain did the work.
- Q7–Q10.** See Example answers.

Source task. (a) Accept reasoned answers either way. Strongest case: it is a primary source for the *experience* of the time — it was written during or just after the plague years by someone who lived through them — but it is invented storytelling, not a record, so it is a poor source for facts like death counts. (b) It can show feelings, behaviour and atmosphere — how people feared, fled, joked and grieved — which laws and wage lists do not record. (c) Check when it was written, whether Boccaccio was in Florence in 1348, that the stories are invented, and whether other sources (chronicles, records) agree with what it describes. (d) Like: both come from Florence and from people alive in the plague years. Unlike: the chronicle sets out to record events year by year, while the *Decameron* invents its stories around the events.

Example answers

Q7. “Villani's chronicle shows Florence from a rich man's desk: how the city suffered in 1348 and how survivors worked and behaved after. But he does not show the experience of a peasant who could not write, and he sees the poor from above. Ibn Khaldun's account shows the same disaster from Tunis, through the loss of his parents and teachers — but it is one man's memory of his own family and circle, not a record of the whole city. Two sources, two places, two points of view: together they show more than either, and still not all.” A strong answer names what each source can show, what it cannot, and joins the two points.

Q8. Strong lord's case, for example: “With so few workers left, wages and prices were climbing together. Holding pay at the old level keeps bread affordable for the poorest and keeps the fields worked, so the whole realm stands steady.” Strong worker's case, for example: “Our numbers are few and the work is the same. The law freezes our pay while prices climb, and takes away the only power scarcity gives us — that is not order, it is force.” A strong answer gives each side its best form before choosing, and judges on reasons, not on which side feels nicer.

Q9. Check: about 80 words; one voice kept throughout; at least two true facts from the section (for example, wages frozen at 1346–7 levels; work cannot be refused under 60; fines doubled or tripled; crops uncut; Florence lost more than half its people); clearly marked as invented.

Q10. Strongest case that it kept order, for example: “Most people saw what happened to lawbreakers, and fear held them back; in a time with no police and few prisons, a public punishment was the cheapest way to keep the peace.” Strongest case that it held down the poor, for example: “The harsh punishments chiefly fell on the poor — workers who asked for more pay, women accused of scolding — while nobles fought their cases by combat or paid fines; the ‘warning’ warned the ruled more than the rulers.” The final answer should set out reasons and name evidence that could test it (for example, records of crime before and after public punishments; whether crime fell where punishments were harsh). Reasoning is marked, not the conclusion.

Where we found these facts

Historians always say where they found things out. So do we.

- The Black Death’s route and toll — Sicily October 1347, Genoa and Venice and Marseille January 1348, England June 1348 (Dorset coast), Scotland 1349 (records 1348–1350); historians’ estimate of 30 to 60 out of every 100 people dead, up to 50 million; the germ *Yersinia pestis* and the fleas of black rats.
- Matteo Villani of Florence (1283–1363), his chronicle, the eleven added books, and his death in the plague of 1363.
- Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), the *Decameron* written 1348–1353, its ten storytellers and hundred stories, and the plague’s taking of his father’s wife.
- The people of Florence before the plague (perhaps 120,000) and the loss of more than half of them in 1348.
- The *Chronicle of the Scottish Nation* by John of Fordun, the first great book of Scottish history, its first five books finished around 1360, and the work carried forward to 1437; the plague’s reaching Scotland in 1349.
- Ibn Khaldun of Tunis (1332–1406), the plague in Tunis in 1348–1349, and the loss of his parents and some of his teachers.
- The Ordinance of Labourers (18 June 1349) and the Statute of Labourers (1351): wages frozen at the custom of 1346–7, work forced on those under 60 without land or a trade, prison, stocks and doubled fines for those who broke the rules — and the law’s poor keeping.
- The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381: Wat Tyler and John Ball, London, the broken promises, and at least 1,500 rebels killed.
- Trial by combat, brought to England after the Norman invasion of 1066, a privilege chiefly of nobles, faded out by about 1300 and removed from English law in 1819.
- The ducking stool, chiefly for women accused of scolding and sometimes for dishonest shopkeepers, in English records back to medieval times (the word *cucking* from about 1215).

All checked on 24 August 2026.

People who changed medieval Europe: the Church and four individuals

What this section teaches. History, Levels 7 and 8, *Historical Knowledge and Understanding*, Investigation: Europe and the Mediterranean world (c. 600–1750 CE), depth topic: **Medieval Europe**.

Content description **VC2HH8K22**.

This section teaches elaborations **VC2HH8K22 . E01** and **VC2HH8K22 . E02**:

- **E01** — the Church’s role in medieval Europe: social services (education, health care, welfare) and the organisation of feudal villages
- **E02** — the influences and contributions of four individuals: Gregory the Great, Charlemagne, Hildegard of Bingen and Alfred the Great

The other elaborations of VC2HH8K22 belong to menu topics this book has not chosen (the Ottoman Empire, Vikings, Renaissance Italy, the Spanish and the Americas, and the emergence of the modern world in Europe). They are listed in the plan, not taught here.

Teaching sequence

1. The world of medieval Europe

Medieval means “of the Middle Ages” — in this book, the years roughly from 500 to 1500 CE. (c . before a date means *about*. CE stands for *Common Era*, the counting system historians use for these years.) People in medieval Europe had no phones, no printing, no public schools and no public hospitals. So who taught children, cared for the sick and looked after people with no family or food?

More than any other group, the answer was **the Catholic Church**. The Church was not just a place people prayed on Sunday. It was the one organisation that reached into every kingdom of western Europe. It owned more land than any king. Its priests, monks and bishops were almost the only people who could read and write. And it ran the services that today we expect from schools, hospitals and governments.

In this section you will study **one group** — the Church — and **four people** — Gregory the Great, Charlemagne, Hildegard of Bingen and Alfred the Great. Then you will learn how to judge a *contribution*: the part someone played in making change happen.

Two words from Year 5–6 are worth setting up again, because we will use them in every task:

- A **primary source** comes from the time being studied — a letter, a law, a building, a coin, a book written then.
- A **secondary source** is made later, by someone using primary sources — a historian’s book, or this page.

A *contribution* is simply the part someone played in making something happen. A *change* is a way of life becoming different from how it was before.

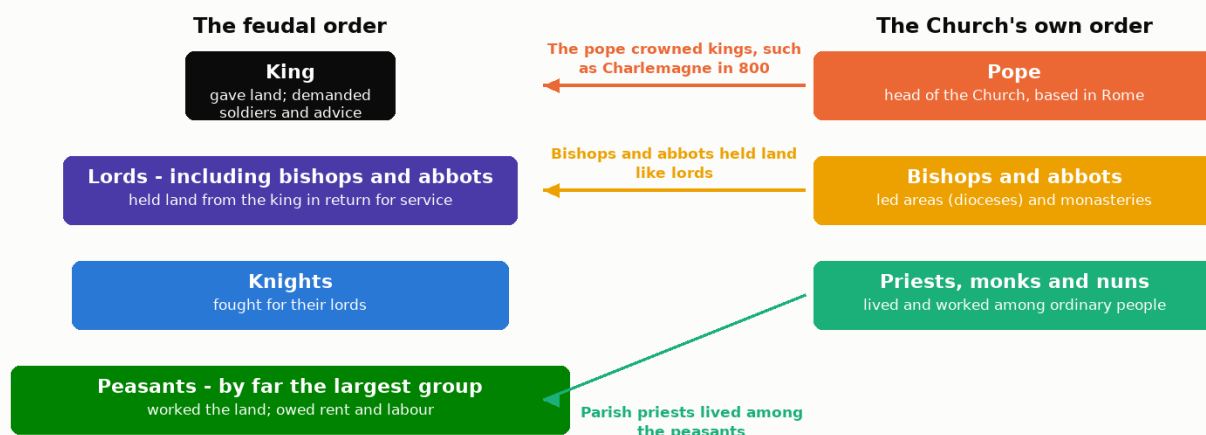
A contested term: *feudalism*. The curriculum uses the word *feudal* but does not define it, and historians do not all agree about what *feudalism* means. In this section, *feudal* is used in the sense set out by the historian Marc Bloch in *Feudal Society* (1939–40): a way of organising society by land and service, in which a king gave land to lords, lords gave land to knights, and peasants worked the land in return for protection. Other definitions exist and are not the same as this one. Some historians, such as Elizabeth A. R. Brown in her 1974 article “The Tyranny of a Construct”, argue that *feudalism* is a later label that makes medieval life look more tidy than it really was. That is a fair warning: keep in mind that real villages and real kingdoms varied a good deal. When you use the word in this section, use Bloch’s sense above.

2. The Church: the group you meet everywhere (E01)

Picture the feudal order as a ladder. At the top stood the king. Below him came lords and bishops, who held land from the king and owed him soldiers and advice in return. Below them came knights. At the bottom — and far the largest group — stood the peasants, who worked the land.

The Church sat at every level

The feudal ladder on the left, the Church's own order on the right. Follow the arrows.



Land went down the left ladder; food, rent and labour came up. The Church's people stood on both ladders at once.

A diagram of the feudal order showing the Church's place in it, from the pope and bishops at the top down to parish priests living among the peasants

Notice where the Church sits: **at every level at once**. The pope crowned kings. Bishops and abbots (the heads of monasteries) held great estates like lords. Monks copied books and worked farm land. And parish priests lived in the villages, side by side with the peasants. No other group touched every rung of the ladder.

A **monastery** is a religious house where monks (or nuns) live, work and pray together under a rule. The most famous rule in western Europe was the *Rule of St Benedict*, written by Benedict of Nursia in Italy in about 530 CE. It told monks how to live — and two of its chapters matter a lot to us, because they made care for people a *duty*, not just a kind thought. You can read them in Source A below.

Source A - the Rule of St Benedict

Written by Benedict of Nursia in Italy in about 530 CE. Adapted into plain English by the author.

Chapter 36 - care of the sick

Care of the sick is to come before and above everything else, so that they are served as if they were Christ himself.

Chapter 53 - guests and visitors

All guests who arrive are to be welcomed as if they were Christ. Let special care be shown in receiving the poor and visitors.

Ask of any source:

Who wrote this?

Benedict, a monk, for monks living under his rule.

When?

About 530 CE - early medieval Europe.

What kind of source is it?

A primary source: a rule book written at the time.

What can it tell us?

What the Church told its people to do for the sick, the poor and visitors.

What can't it tell us?

Whether every monastery followed the rule well. A rule is not proof of practice.

Historians check rules against other evidence - buildings, letters, records - to see what really happened.

An adapted extract from the *Rule of St Benedict*, chapters 36 and 53, on care of the sick and welcome for visitors, with questions to ask of any source

3. Four jobs the Church did (E01)

Here are the four services the curriculum asks about, with one real, dated example of each.

Four jobs the Church did

Services that today we expect from schools, hospitals and governments - and who provided them in medieval Europe.

Service	What the Church did	A real example
Education	ran schools at monasteries and cathedrals; trained scribes who copied books by hand and so kept old writing alive	in 789 CE Charlemagne ordered schools at monasteries and cathedrals; by 1088 the schools at Bologna had grown into a university
Health care	kept infirmaries (sick rooms) in monasteries; ran hospitals for whole cities; grew plants used as medicines	the Hotel-Dieu hospital in Paris, founded in about 651 CE, is the oldest hospital in France and is still open; St Bartholomew's in London was founded in 1123
Care for the poor	gave out food and money to the poor; welcomed visitors with food and a bed; cared for orphans and widows	Pope Gregory I organised grain from the Church's farms for Rome's hungry people in the 590s CE; the Rule of St Benedict made welcoming guests a duty
Village organisation	put a parish church and priest at the heart of every village; saints' days shaped the working year; bishops and abbots held land like lords	villagers paid a tithe - one tenth of what they grew or made - to the Church; Sundays and holy days were days of rest and worship

Each row is drawn from real, dated examples - use them as your evidence in questions.

A table of the four services the Church provided in medieval Europe — education, health care, care for the poor, and village organisation — with a real example for each

Education. Monasteries and cathedrals ran the schools of medieval Europe. Monks trained as **scribes** — people whose job was to copy books by hand, letter by letter — and without them the writings of Greece, Rome and the early Church would have been lost. In 789, the emperor Charlemagne issued a written order called the *Admonitio generalis*, telling monasteries and cathedrals to set up schools to teach boys to read. By the 1100s, Church schools had grown into the first universities — Bologna in 1088 is counted as the oldest. Almost everyone who could write had been taught by the Church.

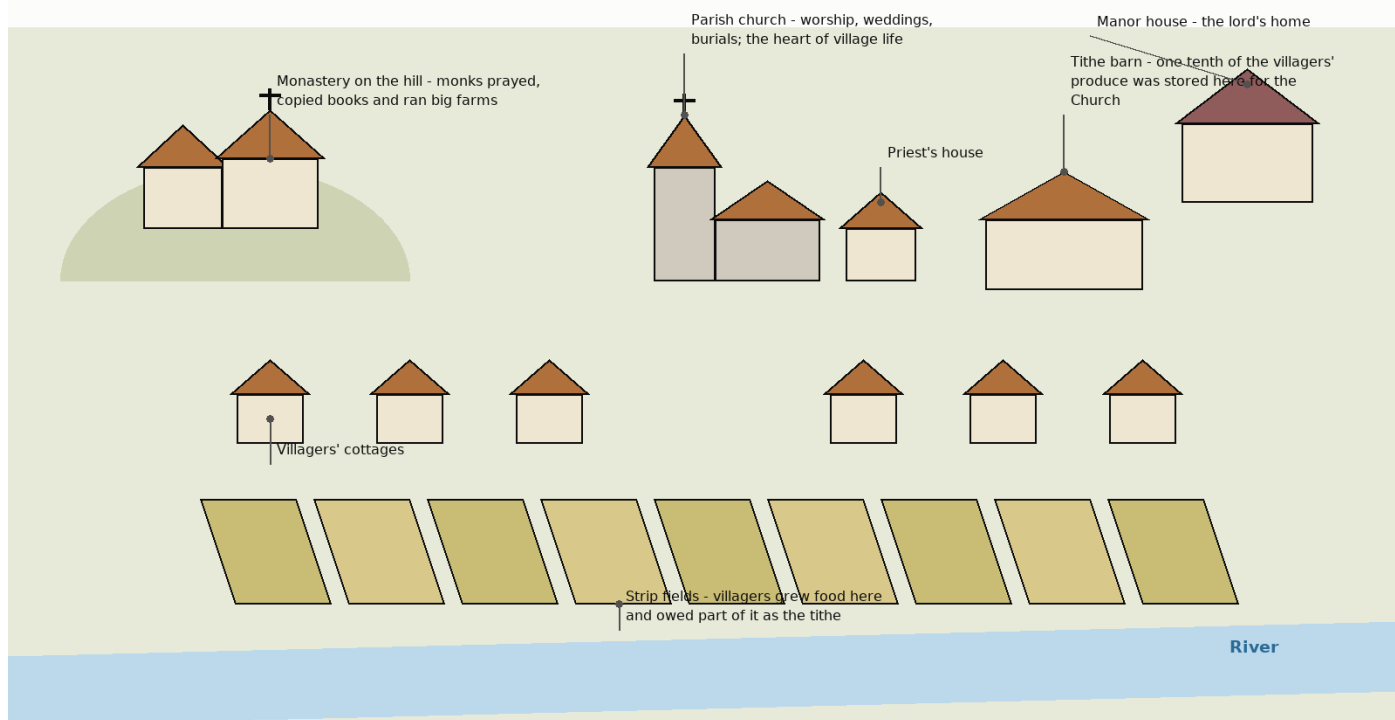
Health care. Monasteries kept infirmaries (sick rooms) for their own members and often for outsiders too. The *Rule of St Benedict* (chapter 36) put care of the sick above all other duties. Church-run hospitals served whole cities: the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris, founded in about 651 CE, is the oldest hospital in France and is still open today; St Bartholomew's hospital in London was founded in 1123 by a man named Rahere and still stands on the same site. Monks also grew plants used as medicines in their gardens.

Care for the poor (social welfare). Church teaching said its wealth belonged to the poor, with the Church only looking after it. Pope Gregory I (you will meet him in part 4) organised grain from the Church's farms to be handed out to hungry people in Rome in the 590s. Monasteries gave visitors food and a bed — chapter 53 of the *Rule* said guests were to be welcomed “as if they were Christ”. Bishops and monasteries also cared for orphans and widows, who had no one else to speak for them.

Feudal village organisation. At the heart of most villages stood the parish church with its priest. The villagers gave the Church a **tithe** — one tenth of what they grew or made each year. Church days shaped the whole year: Sundays were for rest and worship, and saints' days were holidays from work (the word *holiday* comes from *holy day*). Bishops and abbots were also feudal lords, holding land from the king and sending knights when he called.

A medieval village

A model village drawn to show the Church's place in it. Real villages varied, but most had a church and a priest.



Church days shaped the year too: Sundays and saints' days were days of rest - the word 'holiday' comes from 'holy day'.

A labelled diagram of a medieval village showing the parish church, the tithe barn, the villagers' homes, the fields and the monastery on the hill

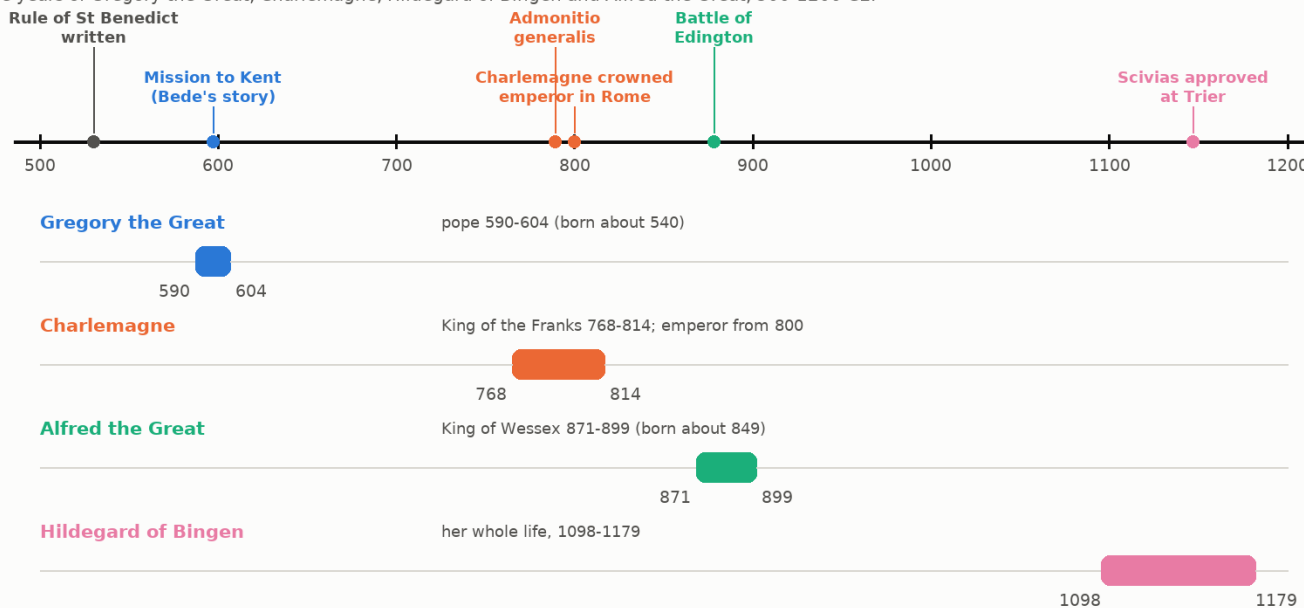
A balanced view matters here. The Church's care was real and vital — no other group did these jobs. But the Church's land and tithes also gave it great power over ordinary people, and its leaders lived far better than the peasants who paid. Historians weigh both sides: the help given, and the power held. You will meet more of that power in sections 3A and 3C.

4. Four people who led change (E02)

Groups matter, but so do people. The curriculum names four individuals for this topic. Three were rulers; one was a woman who never wore a crown but whose writing was read across Europe. Each changed things in a different way.

Four lives, one timeline

The years of Gregory the Great, Charlemagne, Hildegard of Bingen and Alfred the Great, 500-1200 CE.



Bars show each person's years of rule - or, for Hildegard, her whole life. The dots on the axis are events from this section.

A timeline from 500 to 1200 CE showing the lifetimes of Gregory the Great, Charlemagne, Hildegard of Bingen and Alfred the Great, with key events marked

Gregory the Great (pope 590–604 CE). Gregory was born in about 540 CE into a rich Roman family. He gave his family home to become a monastery, and in 590 CE he became pope — the first monk ever to hold the job. He changed things in three ways. First, he strengthened the job of pope itself, writing letters and orders to bishops all over Europe — more than 850 of his letters survive. Second, in 597 CE he sent a mission of about forty monks, led by Augustine, to the kingdom of Kent in England; King Æthelberht let them settle at Canterbury, and this mission spread Christianity through much of England (the monk Bede wrote the story in about 731 CE). Third, he looked after Rome's poor by organising grain from the Church's farms. His book *Pastoral Care*, written about 590 CE, became the handbook for bishops for hundreds of years. By the late 800s he was known as “the Great”.

Charlemagne (King of the Franks 768–814; emperor from 800). Charlemagne (“Charles the Great”) ruled a huge area of western Europe from his base at Aachen. On 25 December 800 CE, Pope Leo III crowned him emperor in Rome — a moment that joined Church and king into one team at the top of society. His greatest lasting change was in learning. His 789 order, the *Admonitio generalis*, commanded schools at monasteries and cathedrals. He gathered scholars at his court, above all Alcuin, who had come from York in England. His scribes copied and corrected old books, and many of those copies are the only reason we still have them today. Historians call this revival of learning the Carolingian renaissance. We know about him from his own written orders and from a life written by Einhard, a scholar who had worked at his court, in about 817–830 CE.

Alfred the Great (King of Wessex 871–899). Alfred was born in about 849 CE at Wantage. He became king of Wessex, in southern England, in 871, while Danish armies were taking kingdom after kingdom. In 878 he beat the Danish leader Guthrum at the Battle of Edington; Guthrum accepted baptism and made peace. Alfred then built a network of **burhs** — fortified towns about a day's march apart, so help could reach any village fast. His bigger change was in learning. Alfred saw that “learning had decayed”, as he put it in a letter to his bishops, and he had key books translated from Latin into English — the language people actually spoke — including Gregory's *Pastoral Care*. He also had the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* kept up, a record of events year by year. His court biographer Asser wrote the *Life of King Alfred* in 893 CE. Alfred is the only English king ever given the name “the Great”.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179). Hildegard was born in about 1098 in what is now Germany and entered the Church as a child, living with an older holy woman named Jutta. She became the head of her own community and founded two monasteries, at Rupertsberg in 1150 and Eibingen in 1165. Between 1141 and 1151 she wrote down her visions in a book called *Scivias*; in 1147–48 Pope Eugenius III and a church council at Trier examined it and approved it — a rare honour, above all for a woman. She wrote music that is still sung today, books on plants and medicine, and

about 400 letters to popes and emperors. She even toured towns preaching, which almost no woman of her time was able to do. Her story shows that in medieval Europe the Church was one of the few paths by which a woman's voice could reach the whole of Europe.

The four people of this section

All four led change in medieval Europe - but in different ways and different times.

Who	When	Their role	The change they led	Evidence we use
Gregory the Great	pope 590-604 CE; born about 540	a monk who became pope	strengthened the pope's role; sent Augustine's mission to Kent in 597; organised grain for Rome's poor; wrote Pastoral Care, the bishops' handbook for centuries	over 850 of his letters; Bede's history (about 731 CE); the book Pastoral Care itself
Charlemagne	King of the Franks 768-814; crowned emperor 800	ruler of most of western Europe	joined Church and crown when crowned emperor in Rome; ordered schools in 789; his scribes copied old books that would otherwise be lost	his written orders (the Admonitio generalis); Einhard's Life (about 817-830); buildings and coins
Alfred the Great	King of Wessex 871-899; born about 849	king who defended southern England	beat Guthrum at Edington in 878; built burhs so villages could be defended; had books translated into English; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle kept up in his reign	Asser's Life of King Alfred (893 CE); Alfred's own letter to his bishops; the Chronicle
Hildegard of Bingen	1098-1179 CE; founded houses 1150 and 1165	abbess, visionary, writer, composer	her vision-book Scivias was approved by the pope in 1147-48; her music and books were read across Europe; preached in towns - rare for any woman of her time	Scivias (1141-51); about 400 letters; her music, still sung today

Use this table as your base of facts, then use the four questions in the significance figure to judge each person's contribution.

A comparison table of the four individuals — Gregory the Great, Charlemagne, Hildegard of Bingen and Alfred the Great — with their dates, roles, the change they led and the evidence that survives

5. How big a change? Judging contribution

Anyone can list what someone did. The historian's harder job is to judge how much it *changed things*. Use these four questions, which we will use again in section 6C:

Judging a contribution: four questions

Use these four questions whenever you weigh how much someone changed things.

1. How many people felt the change?

One village? A kingdom? All of Europe?

2. How deep was the change?

A small adjustment, or a whole new way of living?

3. How long did it last?

A few years - or centuries?

4. What is your evidence?

Name the sources that show the change happened.

The questions applied

The change	The four questions answered
Alfred's burhs (fortified towns, 870s-890s CE)	How many: villagers across Wessex, where help could reach almost any village in a day. How deep: defence stopped being each family's job alone. How long: the fortified towns grew into England's cities. Evidence: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; the remains of the burhs found by archaeologists.
The Hotel-Dieu hospital (Paris, about 651 CE)	How many: the sick and poor of Paris. How deep: care for the sick became organised, not just family luck. How long: still open today - more than 1,300 years. Evidence: the hospital's own records, kept from the early 800s.

In your answers, don't just list what happened - judge it with these four questions.

A table of four questions for judging a contribution — how many people changed, how deep the change was, how long it lasted, and what evidence shows it — applied to two examples from this section

1. **How many people** felt the change?
2. **How deep** was it — a small adjustment, or a new way of living?
3. **How long did it last** — a few years, or centuries?
4. **What is your evidence** — which sources show the change happened?

Watch the pattern: two of our four people (Charlemagne, Alfred) pushed *education*; one (Gregory) pushed the *reach* of the Church itself; and Hildegard showed what one determined voice could do *inside* the Church. The group behind much of all of it was the Church — which is exactly why the curriculum asks you to study a group *and* individuals here.

6. Be careful with the evidence

Einhard, who wrote Charlemagne's life, had worked at his court, called him a foster-father, and owed him everything. His book is full of praise and skips the awkward parts. That does not make it useless — it makes it *partial*. Historians check such writing against other evidence: Charlemagne's own laws, buildings and coins.

Ask the same of every source here: **Who made it? When? For whom? What did the maker get out of it — and who did they leave out?** Bede, Einhard, Asser and Alfred were all Church men or kings. Almost no peasant could write. So the voices of the people at the bottom of the feudal ladder reach us mainly through the words of the people above them. You will practise spotting this in the inquiry task below, and you will study perspective in earnest in sections 5C–5E.

Worked examples

Both examples answer exam questions in full sentences. Read the left column (what we write), then the right column (why that move earns the mark).

Example 1 — with help

Question: Explain how the Catholic Church contributed to change in medieval Europe through health care.



What we write	Why
The Catholic Church changed how sick people were cared for in medieval Europe.	Open with a clear claim that answers the question.
Before this, care for the sick usually came from family, if they had any.	Say what things were like <i>before</i> the change — you cannot show change without a “before”.
Monasteries kept infirmaries, and the <i>Rule of St Benedict</i> (about 530 CE) told monks to put care of the sick before all other duties.	Give a dated, named piece of evidence.
Church-run hospitals served whole cities: the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris opened in about 651 CE and is still open today, and St Bartholomew’s in London was founded in 1123.	Add a second piece of evidence, so the claim does not rest on one example.
This mattered because sick people with no family, and poor people, could now get food, a bed and care — care that lasted in these places for centuries.	Explain <i>why</i> the evidence shows change, and say how long it lasted.
So through its rule, its monasteries and its hospitals, the Church turned care for the sick from family luck into organised help.	Close by linking back to the words of the question.

The full model paragraph, put together:

The Catholic Church changed how sick people were cared for in medieval Europe. Before this, care for the sick usually came from family, if they had any. Monasteries kept infirmaries, and the *Rule of St Benedict* (about 530 CE) told monks to put care of the sick before all other duties. Church-run hospitals served whole cities: the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris opened in about 651 CE and is still open today, and St Bartholomew’s in London was founded in 1123. This mattered because sick people with no family, and poor people, could now get food, a bed and care — care that lasted in these places for centuries. So through its rule, its monasteries and its hospitals, the Church turned care for the sick from family luck into organised help.

Example 2 — with help

Question: Choose one individual from this section. Explain their role and contribution to change in medieval Europe. (*This model chooses Alfred the Great.*)

What we write	Why
Alfred, king of Wessex from 871 to 899 CE, led change in two ways: defence and learning.	Name the person, give their dates and role, and preview your points.
In 878 he beat the Danish leader Guthrum at the Battle of Edington, and he then built a network of fortified towns called burhs, about a day’s march apart.	First contribution: state it with dates and places.
This meant that when raiders came, help could reach almost any village in a day — a real change in how ordinary people were protected.	Explain the change the contribution caused.
Alfred also saw that learning had decayed, and he had key books, such as Gregory’s <i>Pastoral Care</i> , translated from Latin into English, the language people actually spoke.	Second contribution, with the evidence of what he did.
We know this from his own letter to his bishops and from Asser’s <i>Life of King Alfred</i> , written in 893 CE.	Name your sources — the examiner is listening for this.
Alfred’s contribution was deep and long-lasting: England kept its independence against the Danish armies, and books began to be written in English, not just Latin.	Finish by judging the change using the four questions from part 5.

Practice questions

Practice with help

- Q1.** The Church provided four services in medieval Europe: education, health care, care for the poor, and village organisation. Copy the table from the figure in part 3 into your book. For each service, write one named, dated example of your own from this section.
- Q2.** Gregory the Great: (a) In what years was he pope? (b) Who did he send to England in 597 CE, and where did they settle? (c) Give one thing he did for the poor of Rome.
- Q3.** Charlemagne: (a) When, where and by whom was he crowned emperor? (b) What did his order of 789 CE, the *Admonitio generalis*, command monasteries and cathedrals to do? (c) Why did copying books by hand matter so much before printing existed?
- Q4.** Alfred the Great: (a) Which battle did he win in 878 CE, and against whom? (b) What were burhs, and how did they help ordinary people? (c) Name one book he had translated into English, and say why English mattered more than Latin here.
- Q5.** Hildegard of Bingen: (a) Give two of her roles or jobs. (b) What is *Scivias*, and who approved it in 1147–48? (c) Why was it unusual, for her time, that her writing was read across Europe?
- Q6.** Using the timeline figure, put these five events in order from first to last: the *Admonitio generalis* issued; Hildegard's death; Charlemagne crowned emperor in Rome; Augustine's mission lands in Kent; *Scivias* approved at Trier. Write the dates beside each.

Practice on your own

- Q7.** “The Church as a group did more to change medieval Europe than any single ruler did.” Do you agree? Write a paragraph giving your view, using at least two named examples from this section. Then write one sentence steelmanning the other side (put the opposite view in its strongest form before you reject it).
- Q8.** Explain how a monastery could change life in a nearby village. Give at least three ways and say whether each change was a help to the villagers, a burden, or both.
- Q9.** Einhard worked at Charlemagne's court and said he owed him everything. Why might a historian treat parts of his biography with caution? Give one other kind of evidence a historian could check it against.
- Q10.** Write a paragraph arguing that Hildegard's work mattered to people in her own time. Use two dated facts from this section and the four questions from part 5 to judge how deep and how lasting her change was.
-

Inquiry task — whose voices can we hear?

Work with the three sources below. Each has been adapted into plain English from a primary source. Source A appears in part 3; Sources B and C are shown here.

Source B — adapted from a letter of King Alfred to his bishops (about 890 CE), sent with copies of *Pastoral Care* in English:

“I remembered how, before it was all ravaged and burned, the churches across England stood filled with treasures and books. The priests could not understand any of their books, because they were not written in their own language. So I have had this book translated into English, and I command that a copy be sent to every bishopric in my kingdom.”

Source C - from Scivias

By Hildegard of Bingen, written 1141-1151 CE. Adapted into plain English by the author.

In the year 1141, when I was forty-two years and seven months old, a fiery light from heaven broke into my mind and heart. And so, even though I was weak and untaught, I wrote down what I had seen, with God's help.

What we know about this source

Made by	Hildegard of Bingen, an abbess in what is now Germany
When	1141-1151 CE; examined and approved by Pope Eugenius III and a church council at Trier in 1147-48
Kind of source	A primary source: a vision-book written at the time
Why it matters	For a woman's writing to be read across Europe then was almost unheard of

For the inquiry task: who was this source for - and whose voices are still missing from it?

An adapted extract from Hildegard of Bingen's Scivias, describing the vision of 1141, with source details and questions

Steps:

1. For each source (A, B, C), copy and fill this table: *Who made it? When? What kind of source is it (rule, letter, vision-book)? Who was it for?*
2. What does each source tell you about what the Church did for people?
3. Which source is most valuable to a historian studying medieval health care? Give a reason.
4. Who is **missing** from all three sources? (Hint: think about who could not read or write.) How could a historian still find traces of those people — buildings, bones, tools, coins?
5. Extension: which of the four individuals from this section would you most like to ask questions? Write three questions you would ask them, and say which sources you would check their answers against.

Answers

Q1. Education — schools ordered at monasteries and cathedrals by the *Admonitio generalis* (789 CE); Bologna's schools grow into a university by 1088. Health care — the Hôtel-Dieu hospital, Paris (about 651 CE); St Bartholomew's, London (1123). Care for the poor — Gregory I organising grain from Church farms for Rome's hungry (590s). Village organisation — the parish priest and church at the village's heart; the tithe (one tenth); saints' days shaping the working year.

Q2. (a) 590–604 CE. (b) Augustine, with about forty monks; they settled at Canterbury in Kent, with King Æthelberht's permission. (c) He organised grain from the Church's farms to be given to hungry people in Rome (also accept: his teaching that the Church's wealth belonged to the poor).

Q3. (a) 25 December 800 CE, in Rome, by Pope Leo III. (b) It commanded them to set up schools to teach boys to read and write, and to correct and copy sacred texts carefully. (c) The only copies of any book were hand-made; if no one copied a book, it was lost forever — so copying was the only way old writing survived.

Q4. (a) The Battle of Edington, against the Danish leader Guthrum. (b) Fortified towns about a day's march apart; they meant help could reach almost any village quickly when raiders came. (c) Any one of: Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine's *Soliloquies*, the Psalms. English mattered because Latin was a language almost no one outside the Church could read — English put learning within reach of far more people.

Q5. (a) Any two: abbess (head of her community), visionary, writer, composer, founder of two monasteries, preacher. (b) Her book of visions, written 1141–51; examined and approved by Pope Eugenius III and a church council at Trier in 1147–48. (c) Women were almost never heard in public in the Church or in politics; for a woman's writing to be read across Europe, and for her to preach in towns, went against nearly every rule of her time.

Q6. 597 — Augustine's mission lands in Kent; 789 — the *Admonitio generalis* issued; 800 — Charlemagne crowned emperor in Rome; 1147–48 — *Scivias* approved at Trier; 1179 — Hildegard's death.

Q7. Look for: a clear yes/no view; two named, dated examples (for the Church: schools, hospitals, the tithe, village life — reaching everyone, every day, for a thousand years; for rulers: Charlemagne's schools order, Alfred's burhs and translations); a judgement using reach, depth and lasting power; and one honest sentence giving the opposite view its strength (for example: "Without rulers like Charlemagne ordering and paying for schools, the Church's schools might never have spread so far"). Mark the reasoning, not the conclusion.

Q8. Look for at least three ways, such as: a place of work (the monastery's farms and workshops employed villagers); care (the infirmary helped the sick; visitors got food and beds); learning (some village boys were taught at the monastery school); religion and the calendar (saints' days, worship, weddings, burials); burden (tithes and labour owed to the monastery as a landowner). Best answers say "both" for at least one way and explain why.

Q9. Einhard was a grateful courtier — he owed Charlemagne his career and his safety, so his portrait leans to praise and skips awkward facts (such as how Charlemagne's wars were fought). A historian could check the life against Charlemagne's own written orders (like the *Admonitio generalis*), buildings such as the chapel at Aachen, coins, and writings by other people at court.

Q10. Look for: two dated facts (for example: *Scivias* written 1141–51 and approved at Trier 1147–48; about 400 letters to popes and emperors; four preaching tours; two monasteries founded in 1150 and 1165); the four questions applied (many people reached across Europe; deep, because a woman's voice was heard where almost none had been; lasting, because her music and books are still read and sung); evidence named.

Inquiry task — expected points. 1. A: monks following Benedict's rule, about 530 CE, a monastic rule, for monks. B: King Alfred, about 890 CE, a royal letter, for his bishops. C: Hildegard of Bingen, 1141–51, a vision-book, for her community and (after approval) the wider Church. 2. A shows care of the sick and of visitors as a duty; B shows a king using the Church's books to spread learning; C shows a woman inside the Church whose voice reached Europe. 3. Source A — it is the only one that makes care of the sick a rule; B is about books, C about visions. 4. Peasants and most women — none could write these sources; traces survive in buildings, bones, tools, coins, village layout. 5. Questions should be checkable against named sources (Bede, Einhard, Asser, Alfred's letters, Hildegard's letters).

Sources and evidence for this section

Primary sources named in this section: the *Rule of St Benedict* (about 530 CE); Pope Gregory I, letters and *Pastoral Care* (590–604 CE); Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (completed about 731 CE); the *Admonitio generalis* (789 CE); Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne* (about 817–830 CE); Asser, *Life of King Alfred* (893 CE); the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (kept up in Alfred’s reign, late 800s CE); Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* (1141–51 CE) and her letters (about 400 survive).

Fact-checking. The dates and claims in this section were checked on 24 August 2026 against the following open sources: Wikipedia, “Pope Gregory I”; Wikipedia, “Charlemagne”; Wikipedia, “Gregorian mission”; Wikipedia, “Admonitio generalis”; Wikipedia, “Alfred the Great”; Wikipedia, “Einhard”; Wikipedia, “Hildegard of Bingen”; Wikipedia, “Rule of Saint Benedict”; Wikipedia, “Hôtel-Dieu de Paris”; Wikipedia, “St Bartholomew’s Hospital”; Wikipedia, “Ecclesiastical History of the English People”. Quotations in the source figures are adapted into plain English by the author from the named primary sources, not copied from any textbook.

Note on the exclusion register. This section carries no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content, per the front-of-book note and TOC §2 D3.

Reading medieval Europe: myths, evidence and historians' debates

Section 3E · Strand: Historical Knowledge and Understanding · Sub-strand: Investigation: Europe and the Mediterranean world (c. 600–1750 CE) · Depth topic: Medieval Europe **Owens:** VC2HH8K23 **Draws on:** .E01 – .E09 (this section teaches .E01–.E02; .E03–.E09 are linkage keys only under the depth-topic rule D7 — they belong to this CD's other study choices, which this book did not choose)

Teaching sequence

1. Words to define before we start

Contested terms, defined before use.

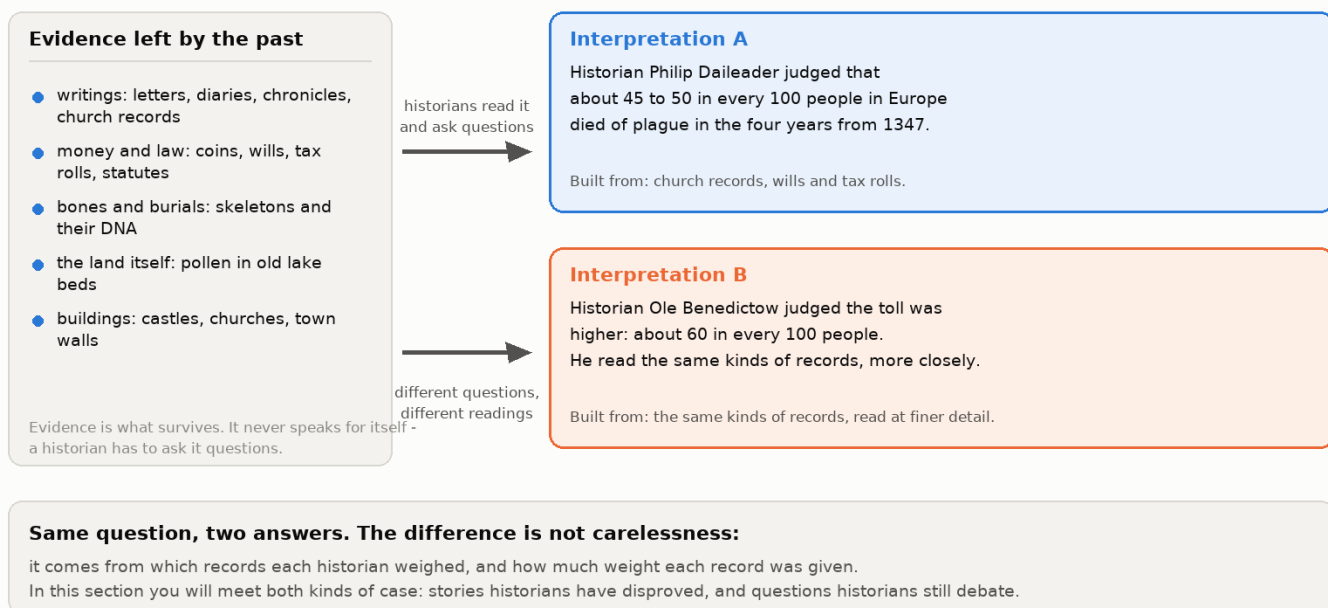
- **Medieval** — from Latin words meaning “the middle age”. Historians use it for Europe’s middle period, roughly **500 CE to 1500 CE** — between the ancient world of Chapter 2 and the modern world of Years 9 and 10. It is the curriculum’s own word for this study.
- **Historical interpretation** — a historian’s reasoned account of the past, built from evidence. An interpretation is not a guess and not “the one right answer”: it is a reading that can be argued for. Two careful historians can read the same evidence and reach different views, because they ask different questions of it or give different weight to the same records. This section lives inside that idea.
- **Myth** — in history, a story that has been handed down and believed but is not supported by evidence. Calling a story a myth is not an insult: myths carry real hopes and fears, and historians study them for that reason too.
- **Legend** — a story that grows up around a person or event and is retold over time, with fresh wonders added at each telling. A legend may hold a grain of truth — sorting the grain from the growth is a historian’s job.
- **Primary source** — a source made at (or very near) the time being studied, such as a letter, a charter, a coin or a skeleton. **Secondary source** — a source made later by someone studying that time, such as a historian’s book. Chapter 5 builds these ideas further.

2. From evidence to interpretation .E01

Everything a historian says rests on evidence — what survives from the past. But evidence never speaks for itself: someone has to ask it questions. Figure 1 shows the move from evidence to interpretation, using one live example you will meet again in part 6: how many people died in the Black Death?

From evidence to interpretation

An interpretation is a historian's account of the past, built from evidence. Two historians can read the same evidence and reach different views without either one being careless.



Model of how a historical interpretation is made: evidence left by the past on one side, a historian's questions in the middle, and the finished interpretation on the other, with a worked example in which two historians read the same Black Death records and reach different estimates

Figure 1. From evidence to interpretation: how a historian reads the past.

Philip Daileader and Ole Benedictow are modern historians who studied the same kinds of records — church records, wills and tax rolls — and gave different answers: Daileader judged that about 45 to 50 in every 100 people in Europe died; Benedictow judged about 60 in every 100. Neither is careless. They differ over which records to trust and how far to push them. That difference is what this section teaches you to think about.

This section covers two kinds of case. First (.E01): famous medieval stories — King Arthur and Pope Joan — and how historians have tested them, and in Joan's case disproved them. Historians test a story by asking the five questions in Figure 2.

How do historians test a story from the Middle Ages?

Five questions turn 'Is it true?' into questions evidence can answer.

1

When was it first written down?

A story first written centuries after it is said to have happened is weak evidence for the event. Writing close to the event is much stronger.

2

Do sources from that time confirm it?

Writings, coins and charters made while the people were alive are the best witnesses. Silence from every near-by source is a warning sign.

3

Does archaeology back it up?

Digging can confirm a battle, a building or a burial. If the ground holds no trace of a claimed event, the story needs more support.

4

Did the story change as it was retold?

Each new telling that adds fresh detail (names, dates, places) is a sign the story is growing from imagination, not from records.

5

Who gained from the story being believed?

Stories are useful: they can back a family's claim to a throne or attack an enemy's good name. Knowing who benefits helps explain why a story spread.

A story can fail several of these tests and still matter to history: it becomes evidence of what later people believed and wanted.

Five questions historians use to test a story from the middle ages: when was it first written down, do sources from that time confirm it, does what digging turns up back it up, did the story change as it was retold, and who gained from the story being believed

Figure 2. Five questions that turn "Is it true?" into questions evidence can answer.

Second (.E02): the Black Death — a real event, not a story — where the debate is not *did it happen?* but *how much did it change Europe?* There, historians still disagree, and you will learn to weigh their readings against each other.

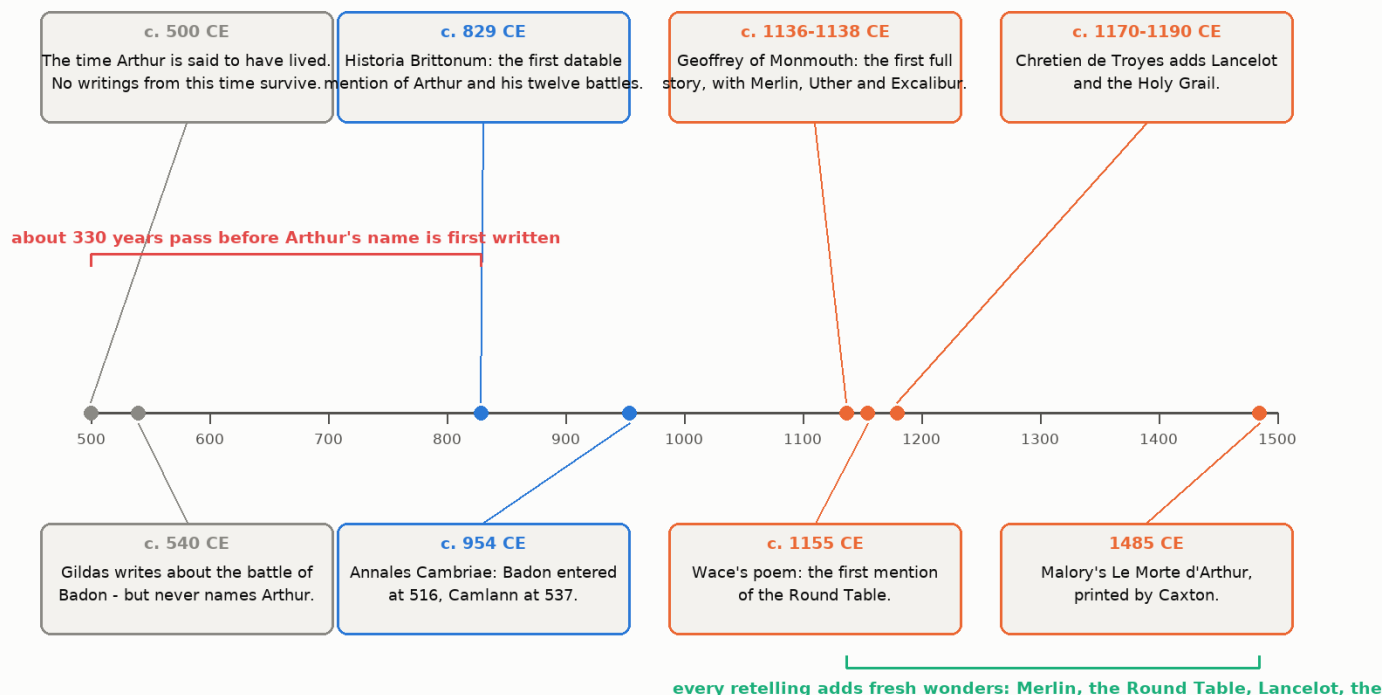
3. King Arthur: the man the stories swallowed .E01

The legend says Arthur was a British war leader who fought off armies from overseas around 500 CE, held a shining court at Camelot and gathered the fighters of his Round Table. Now apply the five questions of Figure 2 — above all, question 1: *when was it first written down?*

Figure 3 lays out every dated text in the Arthur story. Read the red bracket first: **about 330 years pass** between the time Arthur is said to have lived and the first writing that names him.

The growing story of King Arthur

Each step below is a real, dated text. Notice the gap before Arthur's name first appears - and how the story grows each time it is retold.



Rule of thumb: the longer the gap between an event and the first writing about it, the more care the story needs.

Timeline from 500 to 1500 CE of the dated texts that built the Arthur story, from Gildas writing about the battle of Badon without naming Arthur, through the first named mention around 829, to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chretien de Troyes and Malory, with the long gap before Arthur's name appears marked in red

Figure 3. The growing story of King Arthur: about 330 years pass before his name first appears, then 900 years of additions.

- **c. 540 CE** — Gildas, a British churchman, writes about the great British victory at the battle of Badon around 500 CE. He is the nearest writer to the time, and he **never names Arthur**. The leader he praises is a man called Ambrosius Aurelianus.
- **A Welsh poem, *Y Gododdin***, says of one warrior “he was no Arthur” — but the poem survives in a book written around 1250 CE, so no one can be sure how old the line is.
- **c. 829 CE** — the *Historia Brittonum*, a Welsh history by an unknown writer later called Nennius, gives the first datable mention of Arthur: twelve battles won by him, ending with Badon.
- **c. 954 CE** — the *Annales Cambriae*, a set of Welsh year-entries, puts Badon at 516 and Arthur's last battle, Camlann, at 537.
- **c. 1136 CE** — Geoffrey of Monmouth writes the first full story: Merlin the wise man, Arthur's father Uther, and the sword Excalibur. Question 4 of Figure 2 now takes over: every retelling adds fresh wonders.
- **c. 1155 CE** — the poet Wace gives Arthur the Round Table.
- **c. 1170–1190 CE** — the French poet Chrétien de Troyes adds Lancelot and the Holy Grail.
- **1485 CE** — William Caxton prints Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, gathering nearly a thousand years of growth into one book.

So: *was there a real Arthur*? Historians give different answers, and each side has a real case. Figure 4 sets the two strongest readings side by side.

Was there a real Arthur? Historians still answer differently

Both sides below use real evidence. Read each at its strongest before you judge.

YES - a real war leader behind the stories

John Morris, *The Age of Arthur* (1973):

Early writings list twelve battles won by a leader named Arthur, ending with the great victory at Badon.

The Welsh records enter Badon (516) and Camlann (537) as dated events.

Around 500-550 CE the Anglo-Saxon advance into Britain really did halt for a generation - something, or someone, stopped it.

NO - a figure of legend, not history

David Dumville (1977); Nicholas Higham (2002):

No writing from Arthur's own time names him. Gildas, writing near 540 about Badon, never mentions Arthur.

The first datable mention comes about 330 years after he is said to have lived.

The Welsh entries may have been added late to match the stories, and every later retelling adds fresh wonders.

Where both sides agree

The Arthur who reached us - king of Camelot, knight of the Round Table - was shaped by writers living centuries after the fifth century. The debate is about whether any real person stands behind that story at all.

Two historians' strongest cases set side by side: John Morris (1973) argues that a real war leader stands behind the story, while David Dumville (1977) and Nicholas Higham (2002) argue that no early evidence names Arthur at all; below, the points both sides agree on

Figure 4. The Arthur debate at its strongest: yes, no — and the ground both sides share.

John Morris (*The Age of Arthur*, 1973) argues that a real war leader stands behind the stories: early writings list real battles, the Welsh records enter Badon and Camlann as dated events, and around 500–550 CE the overseas advance into Britain truly did halt for a generation — something, or someone, stopped it. David Dumville (1977) and Nicholas Higham (*King Arthur: Myth-Making and History*, 2002) answer that no writing from Arthur's own time names him, the first datable mention comes about 330 years late, and every retelling adds fresh wonders — signs of a growing legend, not of records.

Where both sides agree: the British really did win a great victory at Badon around 500 CE, and the Arthur who reached us — king of Camelot, champion of the Round Table — was shaped by writers living many centuries later. History cannot prove there was no Arthur. It can say this: on the evidence we have, the case for a real Arthur is unproved, while the story itself has a real, dated history you can follow step by step. And notice question 5: kings from Welsh princes to the Tudor dynasty used Arthur to back their own claims to rule — a story that serves its tellers needs extra testing.

Sources: Gildas and the battle of Badon: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gildas and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Badon; Historia Brittonum: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historia_Brittonum; Annales Cambriae: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annales_Cambriae; Geoffrey of Monmouth: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historia_Regum_Britanniae; Malory: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Morte_d%27Arthur; Morris, Dumville and Higham on the debate: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_King_Arthur; accessed 24 August 2026.

4. Pope Joan: the story the records disprove .E01

The second myth of .E01 is about an institution — the Church — rather than a hero. From the 1250s on, most of Europe believed a remarkable story: a clever woman dressed as a man, rose through the Church and was chosen as pope, and was found out when she gave birth during a public walk through Rome. Figure 5 sets the story beside the dated records.

The Pope Joan story: what the legend claimed, what the records show

For centuries many people believed a woman once ruled as pope in disguise. Here is the story beside the dated evidence.

The story (as told from the 1250s on)

- A clever woman dressed as a man, rose through the Church and was chosen as pope.
- She was found out when she gave birth during a public walk through Rome.
- Jean de Mailly, writing around 1250, set her around the year 1099.
- Martin of Troppau, writing in the 1270s, moved her to 855-857, between popes Leo IV and Benedict III.
- The story spread fast and was retold as fact for centuries.

The records (checked by historians)

- No writer near the supposed time mentions her - for about 400 years the story appears nowhere.
- The first written versions appear only in the 1250s - and they cannot even agree on her date.
- A charter dated 7 October 855 and coins of Benedict III show the papal line ran on with no break.
- There is no gap in the lists of popes where she could fit.
- In 1601 Pope Clement VIII declared the story untrue; in 1647 the scholar David Blondel showed step by step why it could not have happened.

Why historians still study a story that never happened

The French historian Alain Boureau (1988) studied the legend itself: when it appeared, how it spread, and why people wanted to believe it. A disproved story is still evidence - of what later ages feared, mocked or argued about.

The Pope Joan story beside the records that disprove it: what writers told from the 1250s on, against dated charters, coins and lists of popes, with a note on why historians still study a story that never happened

Figure 5. The Pope Joan story set against the dated records.

The case against the story is strong, and it is built test by test:

- **Question 1 — when was it first written down?** The story appears nowhere for about 400 years after she is said to have ruled. The first written versions come only in the 1250s.
- **Question 2 — do sources from that time confirm it?** No. A charter dated 7 October 855 and coins of Pope Benedict III show the line of popes running on with no break between Leo IV and Benedict III — exactly the years (855–857) where one version of the story puts her. There is no gap in the lists of popes where she could fit.
- **Question 1 again, turned on the tellers** — the first two versions cannot even agree with each other: Jean de Mailly, writing around 1250, set her around the year 1099; Martin of Troppau, writing in the 1270s, moved her to 855–857. A story still changing its dates 400 years on is a story still being made up.

In 1601 Pope Clement VIII declared the story untrue, and in 1647 the scholar David Blondel showed step by step why it could not have happened.

Give the believers their strongest point before you judge them: for centuries, serious writers retold the story as fact, and each retelling made it feel more familiar. Repeated telling is powerful — that is exactly why question 1 matters so much.

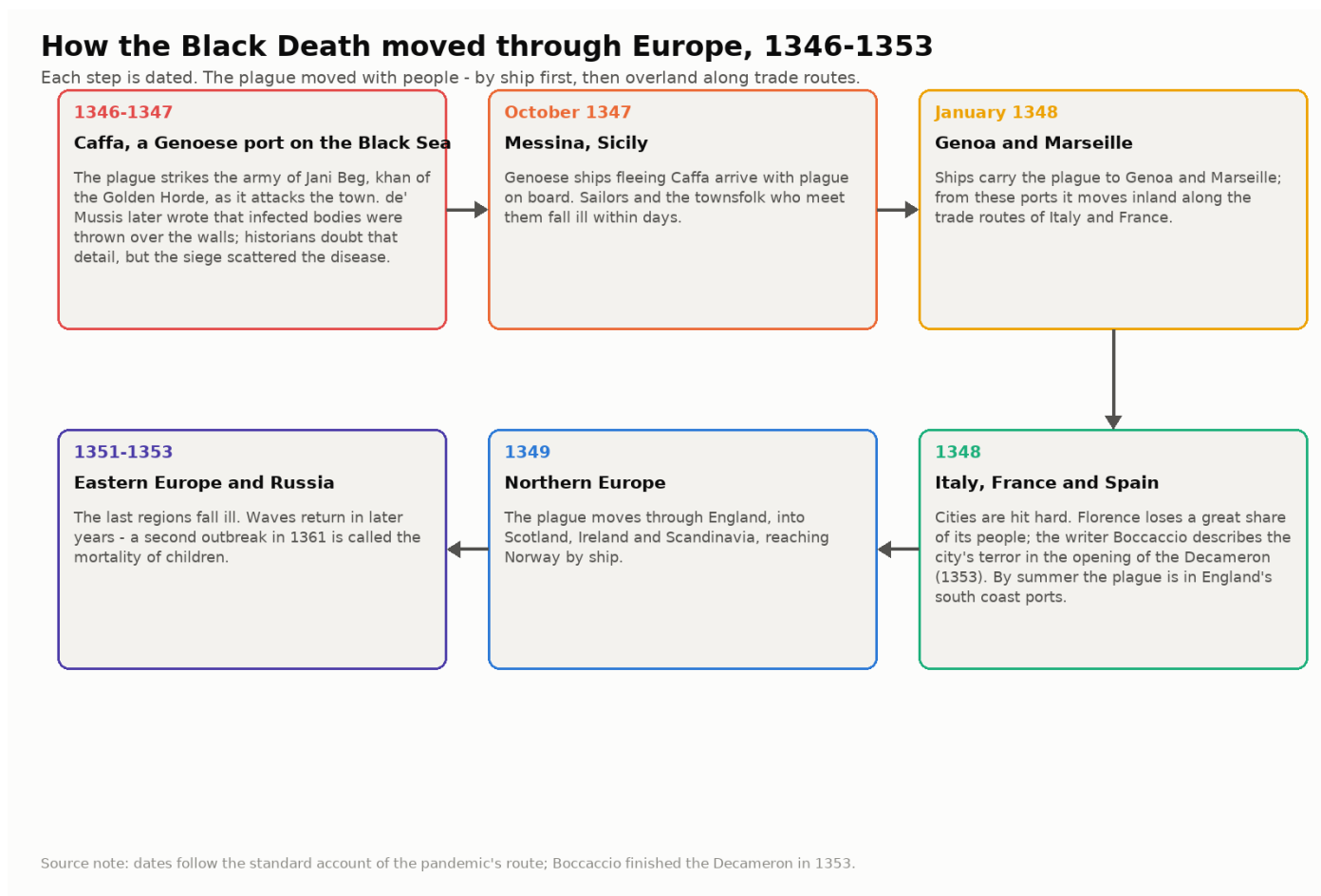
Why do historians still study a story that never happened? The French historian Alain Boureau (1988) studied the legend itself: when it appeared, how it spread, and why people wanted to believe it. A disproved story is still evidence — of what later ages feared, mocked or argued about. The Pope Joan legend is real evidence about the 1250s and the centuries after; it is just not evidence about a woman pope. And the habit you just used — check the date, check the writer, check the purpose — is the same habit you will use on every source you meet in this book.

Sources: the legend and its telling: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Joan; Alain Boureau's study of the legend: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Joan#Scholarly_analyses; accessed 24 August 2026.

5. The Black Death: what happened .E02

.E02 turns from stories to an event — the greatest disaster to strike medieval Europe. The **Black Death** is the name given to the wave of plague that swept Europe from 1346 to 1353.

The killer was a germ, *Yersinia pestis*, carried by fleas that lived on rats and on people's clothes and goods. In 2011 scientists studied the teeth of people buried in a London plague ground around 1349 and showed that the killer germ was *Yersinia pestis*. Figure 6 follows the plague's dated path.



The spread of the Black Death through Europe as six dated steps from Caffa on the Black Sea in 1346 to eastern Europe and Russia by 1353, with arrows showing how the plague moved by ship first and then overland along trade routes

Figure 6. The Black Death moves through Europe, 1346–1353.

The first recorded blow fell at **Caffa**, a port on the Black Sea. In 1346 the army of Jani Beg, khan (a ruler's title) of the Golden Horde, was attacking the town when plague struck the army itself. A writer from Piacenza called Gabriele de' Mussis, writing about 1348–49, claimed the attackers hurled their dead over the town walls to spread the disease. Historians doubt that detail — it appears in his account alone — but the siege still scattered the disease, because fleeing people carried it with them.

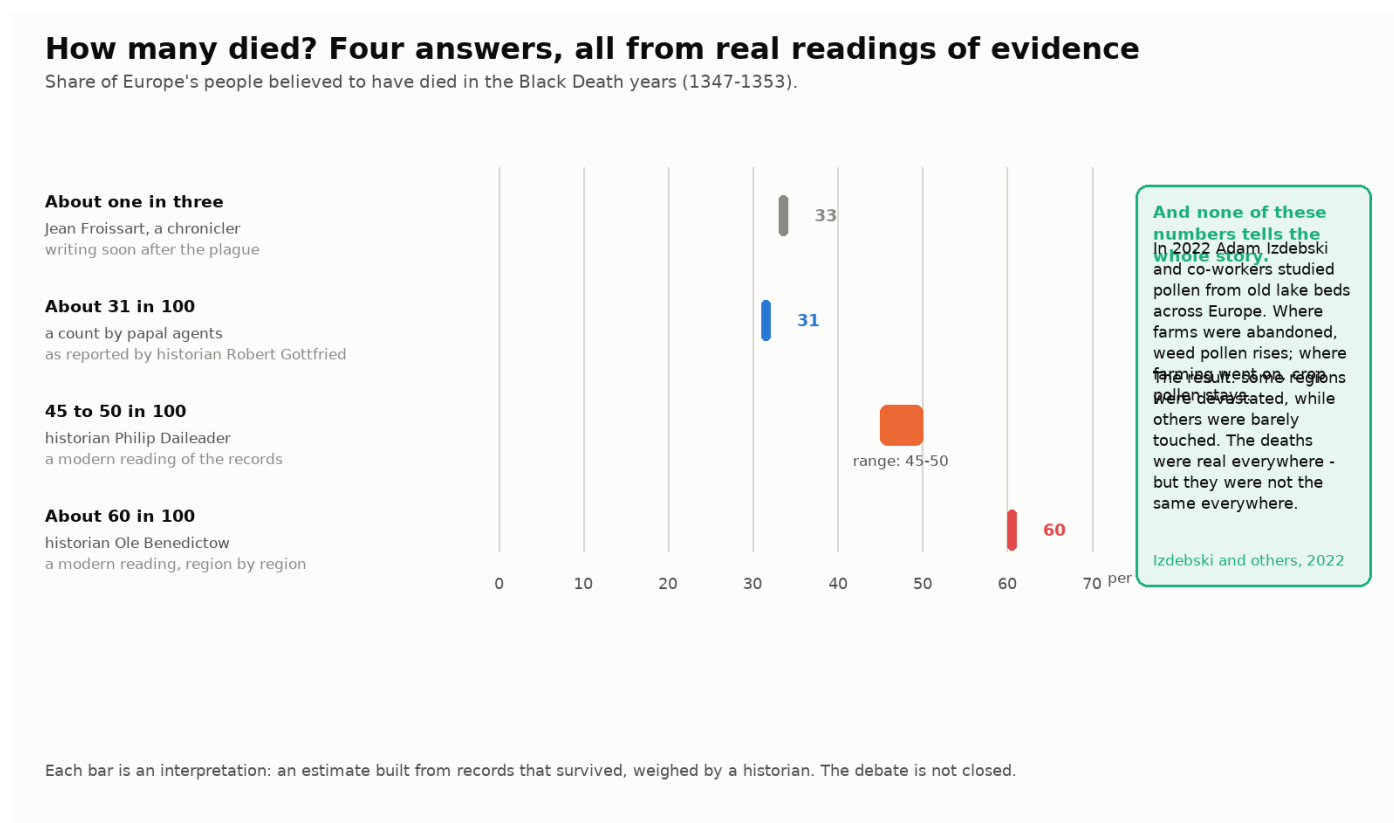
Genoese ships from Caffa reached **Messina** in Sicily in October 1347 with plague on board. By January 1348 it was in **Genoa and Marseille**; during 1348 it swept **Italy, France and Spain** and reached England's south coast ports. In Florence the writer Boccaccio later described the city's terror in the opening of his book the *Decameron* (finished 1353). In 1349 the plague moved through **England into Scotland, Ireland and Norway**, reaching the rest of Scandinavia; by 1351–1353 it had reached **eastern Europe and Russia**. Waves came back in later years — a second outbreak in 1361 was called the mortality of children, because it took the young who had never met it before.

Two lessons for .E02 sit inside this story. First, the plague moved with people — along ship routes and trade routes — so busy, connected places were hit first and hardest. Second, sources from the time (de' Mussis, Boccaccio) are precious, but each is one person's reading: that word *reading* is the bridge to part 6.

Sources: the plague's route and dates: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Death; Gabriele de' Mussis on Caffa: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriele_de%27_Mussis; Boccaccio's Decameron: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decameron; Bos and others, Nature (2011), on the plague germ in London's plague-ground dead: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yersinia_pestis; accessed 24 August 2026.

6. How many died? Four readings of one disaster .E02

.E02 asks you to judge what the Black Death did to Europe, using historians who read it differently. Start with the sharpest disagreement: how many people died?



Four estimates of the share of Europe's people who died in the Black Death, drawn as bars from about one in three up to about 60 in every 100, with a side note on a 2022 pollen study showing the deaths were not the same in every region

Figure 7. How many died? Four readings of the same disaster.

- **About one in three** — Jean Froissart, a chronicler writing soon after the plague. His is the reading closest to the time, and it stuck in people's minds for centuries.
- **About 31 in every 100** — a count made by the pope's agents, as reported by the modern historian Robert Gottfried. An organised count, but made from records that were already patchy.
- **45 to 50 in every 100** — Philip Daileader, reading church records, wills and tax rolls across Europe.
- **About 60 in every 100** — Ole Benedictow, reading the same kinds of record region by region, more closely.

Give each reading its strongest form before choosing between them: Froissart wrote from life; the pope's agents tried to count; Daileader and Benedictow used the same kinds of evidence but weighed different records. The gap between 31 and 60 is not carelessness — it comes from records that survive unevenly across Europe. And in 2022 Adam Izdebski and his team added a new kind of witness: pollen from old lake beds. Where farms were abandoned, weed pollen rises; where farming went on, crop pollen stays. Their study showed that some regions were devastated while others were little touched. The deaths were real everywhere — but they were not the same everywhere, so one number for all of Europe may be the wrong kind of answer.

7. Did the plague change Europe? Two readings of the aftermath .E02

What the Black Death did to Europe is debated in three steps — the three rows of Figure 8. The first two were settled in parts 5 and 6; the third is where historians differ most.

Three questions, two answers each: debating the Black Death's impact

Historians weigh the same period and reach different judgements. Each view below is shown at its strongest.

Q1. How many people died?

View A - about half

Philip Daileader: 45 to 50 in every 100 died in the plague years, judging by church records, wills and tax rolls.

View B - about 60 in 100

Ole Benedictow: records from across Europe point to about 60 in every 100; some poor regions lost even more.

Q2. Was the damage the same everywhere?

View A - a Europe-wide wave

Older accounts treat 1347-1353 as one even wave that swept the whole continent at once.

View B - it varied by region

Izdebski and co-workers (2022): pollen from lake beds shows some regions ruined and others barely touched.

Q3. Did the plague change life at once?

View A - yes, it broke the old order

With so few workers left, wages rose and lords had to pay for labour; this began to end serfdom in western Europe.

View B - change was slow and fought over

The Statute of Labourers (1351) tried to force wages back down; lords resisted change for generations, and serfdom ended at different times in different places.

Neither side in each row is careless. They differ over which records to trust and how far to push them - which is what historical debate is.

Three questions about the Black Death's impact, each with two answers set against each other and the evidence each side leans on: how many died, whether the damage was the same everywhere, and whether the plague changed life at once

Figure 8. Debating the Black Death's impact: three questions, two answers each.

Reading A — the plague broke the old order. With so many dead, workers became scarce. Farm workers and craftspeople could ask for higher pay, and lords had to offer it or lose their workers. In this reading, the plague caused the old system of unfree work to crack open. A *serf* was a farm worker bound to the land, not free to leave without the lord's leave; *serfdom* was that system. Across much of western Europe, serfdom began to weaken after 1349 and slowly came to an end.

Reading B — change was slow and fought over. Rulers pushed back. In England, Edward III's parliament passed the Statute of Labourers in 1351, a law to stop pay rising and to stop workers moving to better offers. Lords resisted change for generations, and serfdom ended at different times in different places. In this reading, the plague did not end the old order at a stroke — it began a long argument about work and pay.

Both readings are right about what they choose to weigh: Reading A measures change over a century; Reading B measures the pushback year by year. Notice the cause-and-consequence language at work — the plague (cause) made workers scarce, and scarcity (cause) raised pay — and the language of change: much changed after 1349, but some things stayed, and what stayed was defended by law. The Church was changed too: many priests died at their posts caring for the sick, parishes struggled to find replacements, and critics pointed at priests who had fled. An event this large never has one consequence; evaluation means sorting which changes were quick, which were slow, and which were fought over.

Sources: the Statute of Labourers (1351): en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statute_of_Labourers; Izdebski and others, 2022 pollen study of land-use change and Black Death deaths: doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01652-4; accessed 24 August 2026.

8. Legacies: what the medieval past hands down .E01 .E02

A *legacy* is something handed down from the past that still shapes life today. All three case studies of this section — a legendary individual, a story about an institution, and a real event — left legacies (Figure 9).

Legacies: what these medieval stories and events handed down		
A legacy is something handed down from the past that still shapes life today.		
What we studied	The legacy	Where you can see it today
The Arthur legend (an individual turned into a story)	Stories of honour, fair play and good rule; a body of books that grew for 900 years; a name still used for ideals.	Films, novels and games retell Arthur's story; leaders still borrow 'Camelot' to describe a hoped-for golden age; Henry VII's choice of the name Arthur for his son (1486) shows how politics used the legend.
The Pope Joan legend (a story about an institution)	A habit of testing stories: when was it first written, and who gained from it being believed?	Every time you check a source's date and purpose in history class you are using the same test historians used to disprove this story.
The Black Death (an event)	With workers scarce, wages rose and serfdom weakened across much of western Europe; the Church lost many priests and some of its standing; the old feudal order began to break up.	The idea that pay follows how scarce work is; parliaments still pass laws about wages; the period opens the road to the modern world you study in Years 9 and 10.
Interpretations themselves have legacies: the way we test evidence today was sharpened by debates like these.		

Table of legacies: the Arthur legend, the Pope Joan story and the Black Death, each matched to what it handed down and where you can see it today

Figure 9. Legacies: what these stories and events handed down.

The Arthur legend handed down a body of stories that has grown for 900 years and a set of ideals — fair play, good rule, honour — that still get borrowed. Kings used it for politics: Henry VII named his first son Arthur in 1486 to tie his new dynasty to the legend, and leaders today still borrow “Camelot” to describe a hoped-for golden age.

The Pope Joan story handed down a habit of mind: test a story before you believe it. When was it first written? Who gained from it? Every time you check a source’s date and purpose in this book, you are using the test that historians used on this legend.

The Black Death handed down real change in how work is valued: with workers scarce, pay rose, serfdom weakened across much of western Europe, and parliaments began passing laws about work and pay — a job they still do. The plague is one of the forces that began to break up the old order and open the road to the modern world you study in Years 9 and 10.

Section 3B looks at the causes and consequences of medieval events in their own right, and 3C and 3D at the people — rulers and ruled, individuals and groups — who lived through them. This section gave you the lens: interpretations. Carry it with you — every chapter in the rest of this book asks whose reading you are being given, and what evidence stands behind it.

Sources: Henry VII's son Arthur: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Tudor; accessed 24 August 2026.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — with help: testing the Arthur story with the five questions (.E01)

Apply three of the five questions from Figure 2 to the King Arthur story, using only dated evidence from this section.

Working	Comment
Q1. When was it first written down? Arthur is said to have lived around 500 CE; the first datable writing that names him is the <i>Historia Brittonum</i> , c. 829 CE.	A gap of about 330 years. The longer the gap, the more time a story has to grow — so late writings are weak evidence for the man.
Q2. Do sources from the time confirm it? Gildas, writing near 540 CE about the victory at Badon, praises Ambrosius Aurelianus and never names Arthur.	Silence from the nearest writer weakens the story. The battle can be real even when the hero's name cannot be confirmed.
Q4/Q5. Did the story change, and who gained? Each retelling adds wonders — Merlin (1130s), the Round Table (1155), Lancelot and the Grail (1170s on) — and kings used Arthur to back their own claims to rule.	Growing detail plus useful tellers means the story needs extra testing before it is taken as history.

∴ the five questions do not prove Arthur never lived; they show that the case for him is unproved on present evidence, while the story itself has a real, dated history.

Worked example 2 — with help: weighing two readings of the Black Death (.E02)

Read the two historians' claims below, then answer the parts in the table.

- **Historian A (Philip Daileader):** "About 45 to 50 in every 100 people in Europe died in the plague years."
- **Historian B (Ole Benedictow):** "Reading the records region by region points to about 60 in every 100; some regions lost even more."

Working	Comment
(a) What does each historian claim?	A: about 45–50 in every 100. B: about 60 in every 100, more in some regions.
(b) What kind of evidence do both lean on?	Records of the time and soon after: church records, wills and tax rolls.
(c) Give one reason they differ.	The records survive unevenly, and each historian weighs different records; regions also differed, so one number cannot fit all of Europe.

∴ evaluating means weighing each reading against its evidence — not picking the bigger (or smaller) number because it sounds right.

Practice tasks

Practice with help

Q1. (.E01) Copy the five questions from Figure 2. For each, give one example from this section — the Arthur story or the Pope Joan story — of that question being used. The first row is done for you.

Question	Example from this section
When was it first written down?	Pope Joan: the story first appears in the 1250s, about 400 years after she is said to have ruled
Do sources from that time confirm it?	
Does what digging turns up back it up?	
Did the story change as it was retold?	
Who gained from the story being believed?	

Q2. (.E01) Use Figure 3. (a) Put these Arthur texts in date order: Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*; the *Historia Brittonum*; Geoffrey of Monmouth's history; the *Annales Cambriae*; Gildas's writing. (b) Roughly how many years passed between the time Arthur is said to have lived and Geoffrey of Monmouth's full story? (c) What does a gap that long mean for how much we can trust the story?

Q3. (.E01) Use Figure 5. (a) Give two pieces of dated record evidence that work against the Pope Joan story. (b) The first two versions put her around 1099 and at 855–857. Why does that disagreement weaken the story? (c) Who was David Blondel, and what did he show in 1647?

Q4. (.E01) Use Figure 4. (a) Give one point John Morris leans on. (b) Give one point David Dumville leans on. (c) Give one thing both sides agree on.

Q5. (.E02) Put these six steps of the plague's path in date order, using Figure 6: England's south coast ports; Messina; eastern Europe and Russia; Caffa; Genoa and Marseille; Norway.

Q6. (.E02) Use Figure 7. (a) Which estimate is the lowest, and who is it linked to? (b) Which is the highest, and who gave it? (c) How does Izdebski's pollen finding change the argument about one number for all of Europe?

Practice on your own

Q7. (.E01) Choose King Arthur or Pope Joan. Explain how historians have disproved the story. Use at least three pieces of dated evidence and two of the five questions from Figure 2.

Q8. (.E01) "A disproved story can still be evidence." Explain this statement using the Pope Joan legend and Alain Boureau's study of it.

Q9. (.E02) Evaluate what the Black Death did to Europe. Use two historians' differing interpretations, and say clearly where they agree and where they differ.

Q10. (.E01 .E02) Choose one legacy from Figure 9. Trace it: where it began, how it was handed down, and where you can see it in Australia today.

Source-based inquiry task

Q11. (.E02; links to the source skills of Chapter 5) Read the adapted source and answer the parts below.

“In the year 1346 the army of the Tartars [the Mongol army] was struck by disease as it besieged the town of Caffa. Dying by the thousand, they ordered the bodies of their dead to be hurled over the walls into the town, hoping the smell would kill everyone inside. ... We who escaped carried the disease with us: sailing on, we brought it to Genoa and the coasts of Italy.” — Gabriele de’ Mussis of Piacenza, writing about 1348–49 about events of 1346–47 (adapted)

- (a) What does de’ Mussis claim the attacking army did at Caffa?
 - (b) De’ Mussis wrote about two years after the events, and his is the only writing that tells this story. Give one reason historians might doubt the bodies-over-the-walls detail.
 - (c) What part of this account can historians check against other evidence? Give one example from this section.
 - (d) Is this a primary or a secondary source? Give one reason for your answer. (A *primary source* is one made at (or very near) the time being studied; a *secondary source* is one made later, using primary sources.)
-

Answers

Q1. Do sources from that time confirm it? — Pope Joan: no source near 855–857 mentions her; a charter of 7 October 855 and coins of Benedict III show the line of popes ran on with no break. Does what digging turns up back it up? — Pope Joan: no find or record fills the gap the story needs. Did the story change as it was retold? — Arthur: each telling adds wonders — Merlin (1130s), the Round Table (1155), Lancelot and the Grail (1170s on). Who gained from the story being believed? — Arthur: kings, from Welsh princes to the Tudor dynasty, used him to back their own claims to rule.

Q2. (a) Gildas (c. 540); *Historia Brittonum* (c. 829); *Annales Cambriae* (c. 954); Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1136); Malory (1485). (b) About 630 years (from c. 500 to c. 1136). (c) A gap that long gave the story centuries to grow, so late books cannot be trusted for the early man — they are evidence for the legend, not for the person.

Q3. (a) Any two of: no writer near the supposed time mentions her; the first written versions appear only in the 1250s; a charter dated 7 October 855 and coins of Benedict III show no break in the line of popes; there is no gap in the lists of popes where she could fit. (b) Two early tellers placing her about 240 years apart cannot both be right — the story was still being made up when it was first written down. (c) Blondel was a scholar who in 1647 showed step by step why the story could not have happened.

Q4. (a) Any of: early writings list twelve battles won by a leader named Arthur; Welsh records enter Badon (516) and Camlann (537) as dated events; the overseas advance into Britain truly halted for a generation around 500–550. (b) Any of: no writing from Arthur's own time names him; the first datable mention comes about 330 years late; every retelling adds fresh wonders. (c) The British really did win a great victory at Badon around 500 CE, and the Arthur who reached us was shaped by writers living many centuries later.

Q5. Caffa (1346–47) → Messina (October 1347) → Genoa and Marseille (January 1348) → England's south coast ports (1348) → Norway (1349) → eastern Europe and Russia (1351–53).

Q6. (a) About 31 in every 100 — the count made by the pope's agents, as reported by Robert Gottfried. (b) About 60 in every 100 — Ole Benedictow. (c) It shows deaths were uneven across regions, so one number for all of Europe may be the wrong kind of answer — the debate should be asked region by region.

Q7–Q10 — see the model responses below.

Q11. (a) He claims the attackers hurled the bodies of their plague-dead over the town walls, hoping the smell would kill the people inside. (b) Any of: he wrote about two years after the event; his is the only account, with no second writer to back it; hurling bodies would be hard to do during a siege and disease would spread more easily by fleas and by fleeing people. (c) Any of: ships from Caffa carried plague to Sicily and Italy in late 1347; plague struck Genoa and Marseille by January 1348; the Golden Horde's army was at Caffa in 1346. (d) Primary (or very near to it) — written about 1348–49 about events of 1346–47 by a person of that time, claiming to have been there; a full answer notes that historians still test it because it stands alone.

Model responses

Q7. Historians have disproved the King Arthur story by testing it against dated evidence. First, question 1: Arthur is said to have lived around 500 CE, but no writing names him for about 330 years — the first datable mention is the *Historia Brittonum* of c. 829 CE. Second, question 2: Gildas, writing near 540 CE, describes the great victory at Badon but praises Ambrosius Aurelianus and never names Arthur, so the nearest source is silent about him. Third, question 4: every retelling adds fresh wonders — Merlin in the 1130s, the Round Table in 1155, Lancelot and the Grail from the 1170s on — which is how legends grow, not how records read. Taken together, these tests show that the case for a real Arthur is unproved. History cannot say he never lived; it can say the evidence we have is for a growing story, not for a man.

Q8. A disproved story can still be evidence because it shows what the age that made and kept it cared about. The Pope Joan legend cannot be true: no source near 855–857 mentions her, a charter of 7 October 855 and coins of Benedict III show the line of popes ran on with no break, and the first written versions appear only in the 1250s. But Alain Boureau (1988) studied the legend itself — when it appeared, how it spread, and why people wanted to believe it. From that angle the story is real evidence: of what later ages feared about the Church, how they argued about women

and power, and how repeated telling can make a made-up story feel like fact for centuries. So historians disprove the event and keep the story — as evidence about the people who believed it.

Q9. Historians agree on the event itself: plague struck Europe from 1346 to 1353, moving by ship and then overland, and it was one of the most deadly disasters in Europe's history. They differ over its impact. On deaths, Philip Daileader judges about 45 to 50 in every 100 died, reading church records, wills and tax rolls; Ole Benedictow judges about 60 in every 100, reading the same kinds of record region by region. On change, one reading says the plague broke the old order — workers became scarce, pay rose, and serfdom began to weaken across much of western Europe. The other says change was slow and fought over — Edward III's Statute of Labourers (1351) tried to force pay back down, and serfdom ended at different times in different places. The 2022 pollen study by Izdebski and his team supports the second reading's caution: some regions were devastated while others were little touched. Evaluating these readings, the fairest judgement is that the plague's impact was real and large everywhere but uneven between regions and slow to work through — which is exactly why differing interpretations still stand.

Q10. One legacy of the Black Death visible in Australia today is the idea that pay follows how scarce work is. It began after 1349, when the deaths made workers scarce across Europe: farm workers and craftspeople could ask for higher pay, and lords had to offer it or lose them. It was handed down through centuries of arguments about work — from the Statute of Labourers of 1351, which tried to hold pay down, to the parliaments that still pass laws about wages today. It reaches me now in Australia's own debates about pay and worker shortages: when workers are hard to find, pay rises — the same cause-and-consequence chain that began with the plague. The Black Death also opened the road to the modern world by weakening serfdom, a change that leads directly into the content of Years 9 and 10.

Q11 (extended model). De' Mussis claims the attacking army at Caffa hurled its plague-dead over the town walls, and that survivors then carried the disease by ship to Genoa and Italy. Historians have reason to doubt the first claim: de' Mussis wrote about two years later, his account stands alone, and disease had easier roads into a town — fleas on rats and on fleeing people. But the second claim fits other evidence: Genoese ships from the Black Sea did bring plague to Messina in October 1347, and by January 1348 it was in Genoa and Marseille. The source is primary, or very near to it: it was written about 1348–49 about events of 1346–47 by a person of that time claiming to have been there. Its value is that it gives a dated, first-hand-feeling account of the plague's start in Europe; its limits are that it stands alone and includes a detail — the hurled bodies — that historians treat as unproved until other evidence supports it. Weighing value against limits is what source evaluation means.