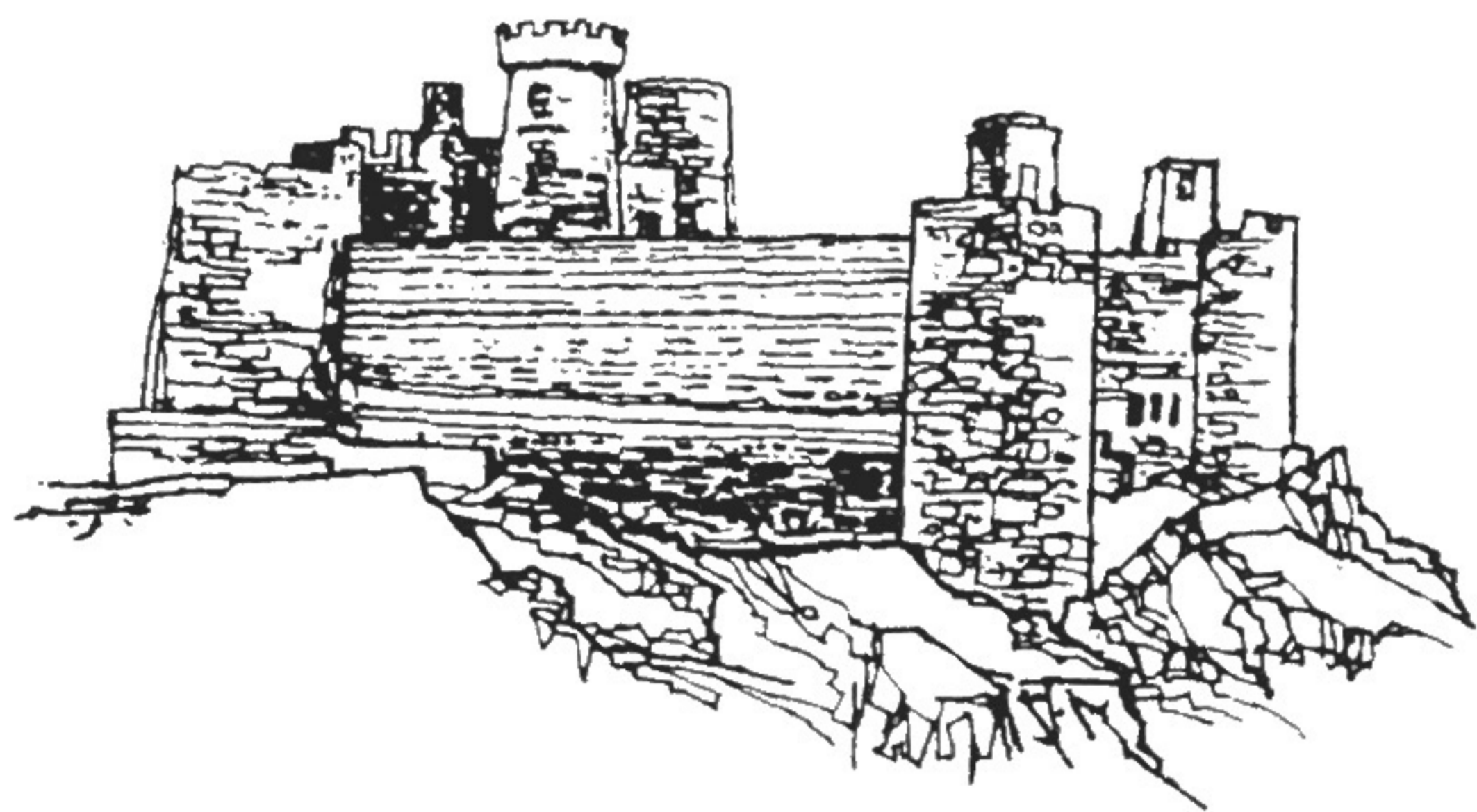


Life in a Medieval Castle

Beginning during the Early Middle Ages, the medieval castle was to become the home of many lords and ladies of the nobility. The word castle comes from the Latin word, *castelum*, which means "fort." Such places were originally simple fortified camps, first built by the Romans, and later by European nobility and military leaders.



Early versions of the castle were constructed by the Normans. Many were built following the defeat of the Saxons by William in 1066, to provide protection for the Norman forces occupying medieval England. These early castles were constructed on top of an earthen mound called a *motte*. A wooden fort was built commanding the lands around the *motte* and enclosed by a *bailey*, a wooden-fenced stockade. The *motte-and-bailey* castle could be thrown up in just a few weeks.

By 1100, England alone had at least 500 such castles. The completion of most castles was followed by the building of a small village for the local people. In time, many of these wooden fortifications were replaced by castles of stone and mortar.

These later models were large and imposing, designed to serve not only as a fort or defensive stronghold, but as home to the lord and his family as well as armory, local governmental center, prison, and treasure house. Such castles often took hundreds of laborers and years to build.

The castles of the High Middle Ages became elaborately constructed fortifications. While there is no standard model, and castles varied widely from one to another, a typical castle included high, thick, stone walls. Built within the walls were round towers called *merlons* from which the castle's defenders

could fire arrows on their enemies. Inside the castle was a large, open courtyard lined with the lord's living quarters, as well as his chapel, workshops, kitchens, and servant's rooms.

Life there was secure and simple. Typically, the noble and his family attended chapel each morning. Time was spent throughout the day in a variety of ways. The lord might oversee his lands outside the castle, confer with his knights, practice his war arts, keep records of trade, and engage in an occasional pastime of chess, backgammon, or cards. The lady of the castle often spent time sewing and raising the children.

Servants were everywhere, carrying out the chores of cooking, keeping animals, tending gardens, and seeing to the needs of lord and lady. Meals were prepared in large open kitchens with broad fireplaces.

Dinners were served in a great hall, which was the central room within the castle. Here, banquets might be held, affairs of state carried out, and entertainment performed. Such halls were often decorated with large tapestries or other embroidered hangings that showed hunting or Biblical scenes. On the floor, straw was scattered about. Here people often sat, for furniture in a castle was scant. The lord might sit in a chair (we use the term *chairman* to refer to one who presides over a meeting for this reason).

Castles were generally cold places. Fireplaces were built in later castles, while earlier ones featured a fire built in the center of the great hall. Bedrooms were often chilly places. Medieval lords and ladies wore several layers of clothing to stay warm.

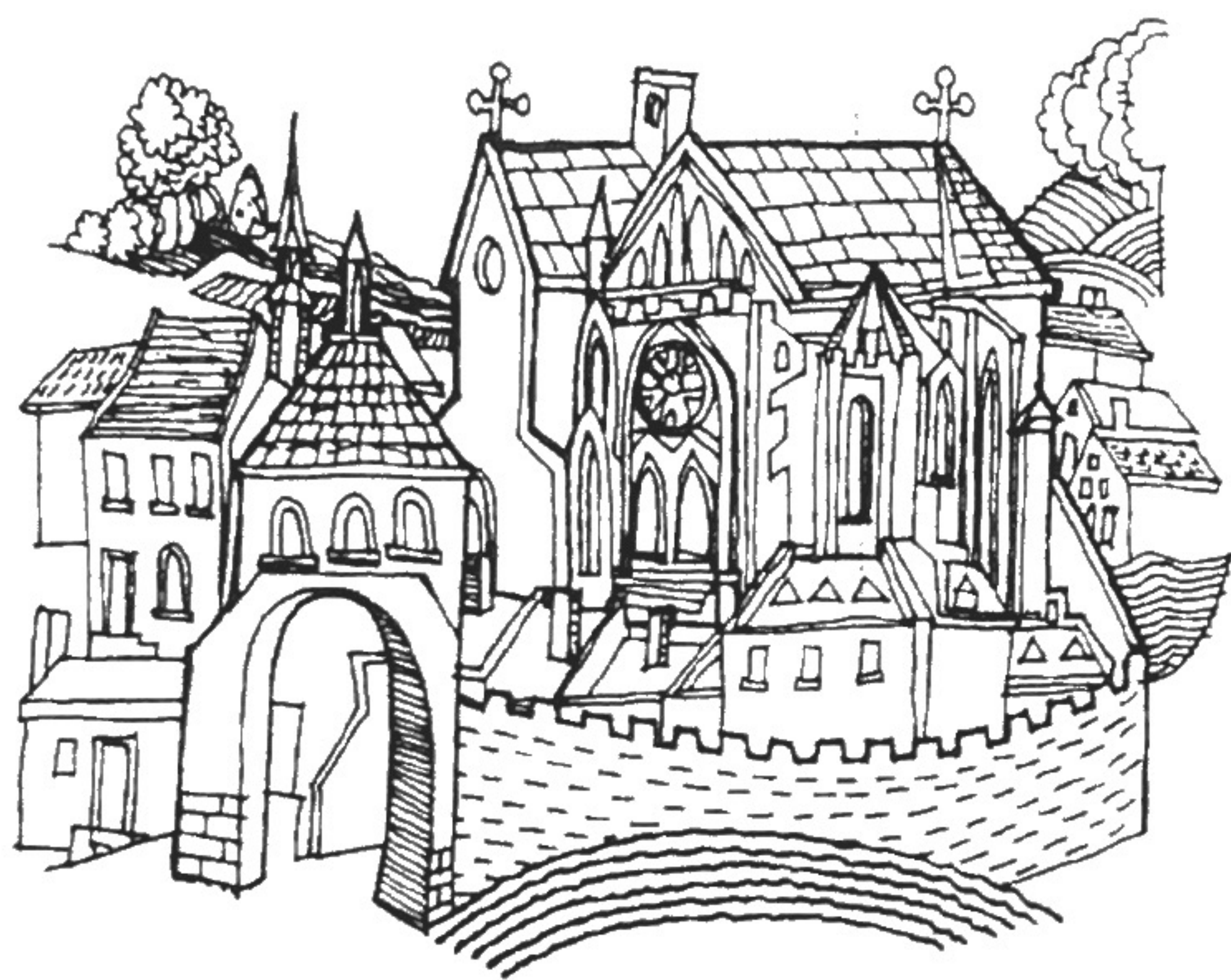
Despite popular myth, medieval people enjoyed taking baths. A castle might include a "bath room" near the kitchen (where hot water was prepared). "Toilets" were built into the walls of the castle. This allowed waste to drop down a chute and into the moat of water surrounding the castle.

Review and Write

What do you think would have been the most uncomfortable part of life in a medieval castle?

Medieval Town Life

During the Early Middle Ages, town and urban life came close to fading away. Old Roman towns sometimes ceased to exist altogether. During the High Middle Ages, however, beginning around A.D. 1000, Western Europe experienced a revival of town life. The influences that had worked to destroy the old Roman communities—a lack of communication and trade, wars, lawlessness, little local government—had been reduced in influence.



Local noblemen were partly responsible for this urban growth. Under the feudal system, the serfs worked the lands of the local lord in exchange for agricultural produce such as sheep, cattle, wheat, and other crops. Such a system did not bring ready cash to the estate, however.

Lords and other nobles began encouraging sprawling settlements of free people to establish themselves under a town charter. Such charters provided the framework of government for a town or borough. Local tradesmen established themselves in the towns, traded and manufactured, and created a local cash economy.

Under this system, urban centers were governed not by the local lord, but through a town council, established under the town charter. Local residents of the town accepted the authority of an elected mayor and other officers of the community. They paid taxes to the local lord and the town officials. Such municipal taxes might be used to construct a defensive wall around the town, or to build roads or bridges.

Such defensive walls were important to the security of the town. The gates of the community were closed at night to keep out marauders and thugs. A night guard patrolled the streets, which were dark without street lights. In case of an emergency—such as a fire or raid—a town crier was responsible for waking up the citizens.

Some of these medieval urban centers were built on the sites of old Roman cities that had fallen into ruin or maintained minimal populations. Others were completely new towns, many built near a local lord's castle or manor house.

The streets of medieval towns were lined with many private homes and businesses, shops which sold a wide variety of goods, many locally produced by the very merchant who ran the shop. There was little advertising along the streets, but local patrons—most illiterate—could identify the shops by signs indicating what was sold inside: a boot, a fish, a loaf of bread. The local barber shop featured a red-and-white-striped pole indicating the place where one could shave and receive a bloodletting, a practice of the day done for health reasons.

Medieval towns were often not pleasant places. There were few sewage systems, and waste water flowed down the streets. People threw their garbage and trash out their doors and windows into the alleyways, where pigs roamed to help clean up the refuse. Typically, streets were narrow, about six or eight feet wide. Mud and manure were everywhere, and keeping clean on a walk down a town lane could be difficult. Such towns smelled bad and could be detected by an approaching traveler from miles away.

If life in such a town was so bad, what caused people to live there? One reason was the freedom one had in a town. Townspeople were not bound to anyone. A common saying of the day told the story: "Town air makes men free."

Town growth was an important development of the High Middle Ages. In 919, Germany had only 30 towns. By 1125, there were 150. By 1300, Paris and Venice had populations of over 100,000, while Milan and London could boast populations of 50,000. By the beginning of the 14th century, approximately 10 percent of Europe's population lived in towns.

The High Middle Ages, Part I

During the 500 years from the collapse of the Roman Empire to the year A.D. 1000, life in Western Europe was less than perfect. With no powerful government in place, the people and powers of the West faced constant challenges from invasion, wars, civil wars, food shortages, and disease.

However, around the year 1000, and for the next 300 years to follow, a dramatic series of changes came to the West. There was a brilliant recovery from the semi-barbarism that had held Western Europe in its clutches for centuries. Life in the West not only improved, it improved substantially. These centuries—from 1000 to nearly 1300—mark the rise of the High Middle Ages.

How did this happen? And what were the changes that allowed Western Europe to turn a corner to a better world? By 1000, many of the Germanic tribes which had proven so destructive in the West had settled down. There were fewer invasions and internal civil wars, bringing greater stability and less chaos.

The nature of destructive wars and invasions changed. Most of the medieval conflicts consisted of lengthy sieges of heavily fortified castles and other fortresses. Typically, no more than a few dozen men were needed to protect a castle, leading to less direct violence and bloodshed. Even field conflicts involving knights were limited skirmishes with minimal loss of life. This allowed more young people to survive, which resulted in a population rise in the West.

This population explosion is an important trend in the West of the 11th and 12th centuries. Other reasons for the population increase include the fact that between the 10th and 14th centuries, Europe was not hit by a major plague or killing disease.

Also, the period between 1000 and 1200 experienced a better weather pattern. This meant a significant long-term warming trend, which brought milder winters and drier summers and allowed for an increase in agricultural production, resulting in healthier people, less disease, and better lifestyles.

The population changes in the West were significantly greater. For example, between 950 and 1350, Europe's population increased from one million to three million. Overall, Europe's population doubled

in the four centuries beginning in A.D. 950.

This growth in population caused some ecological problems for Europe, however. As the population grew, the old balance between the land and the populace was upset: farming was expanded into completely new regions; forests were chopped down and cleared; and swamps were drained for agriculture.

As Europe's population grew by leaps and bounds, the size of feudal holdings also increased. The land owned by a lord typically expanded in size during the High Middle Ages.

The changes that Europe experienced during the High Middle Ages resulted in a decline in slavery. Buying and selling slaves had been an important trade activity during the Early Middle Ages. However, slavery barely survived the High Middle Ages. With the population boom, there was no manpower shortage in the West, resulting in less slavery.

Also, changes in farming and the use of the horse reduced the need for slavery. The High Middle Ages witnessed the adoption of the padded horsecollar, the tandem harness, and the nailed horseshoe—all of which improved the work capacity of the horse by four times. When feeding a horse became cheaper than feeding four slaves, and a horse could produce more work, the result was an inevitable lessening of reliance on human labor. Such innovations were bringing a new quality of life to Western Europe. And more changes were on the way.



Review and Write

How did life in western Europe improve greatly between 1000 and 1300?

The High Middle Ages, Part II

As we have seen, the High Middle Ages brought positive change to Western Europe during the centuries between 1000 and 1300. These changes included advancements in farming methods, an increased urbanization, and new technologies.

Perhaps nowhere else did medieval life change more dramatically than in farming. The heavy-wheeled plow was invented which cut deeper furrows in fields and eliminated the need for cross-plowing, going several times over a field before the soil was broken up enough to plant a crop.

In addition, the three-field system of agriculture was adopted. In earlier centuries, medieval farms used a two-field system. Each spring, half the fields were planted with a grain crop and the other half lay fallow, or lay idle. Under the new system, fields were carved into thirds, with one-third planted with a winter crop of wheat, rye, or barley; another third sown with spring crops of grain, peas, or beans; and only a third left fallow. Such changes brought more abundance from medieval farming.

Industrial changes also occurred during the High Middle Ages. The modern factory did not exist during this period, but other mechanization did. For example, there was a dramatic increase in water and wind-powered mills. Where slaves had once been used to grind grain, the High Middle Ages introduced the water mill. Most such mills provided services for about 50 families, grinding grain, sawing lumber, beating cloth, and crushing ore.

Several significant inventions came into existence in Western Europe during the High Middle Ages. One such medieval invention was the crank, a simple device consisting of two shafts at right angles. This technology transformed up-and-down and backward-and-forward motion into circular motion. The crank allowed people to lift more with less strain. The spinning wheel was another important medieval technology. It allowed for the production of inexpensive thread and cloth. Such a tool gave those of the medieval period a greater access not only to clothing, but to additional items such as sheets, towels, and even underwear.

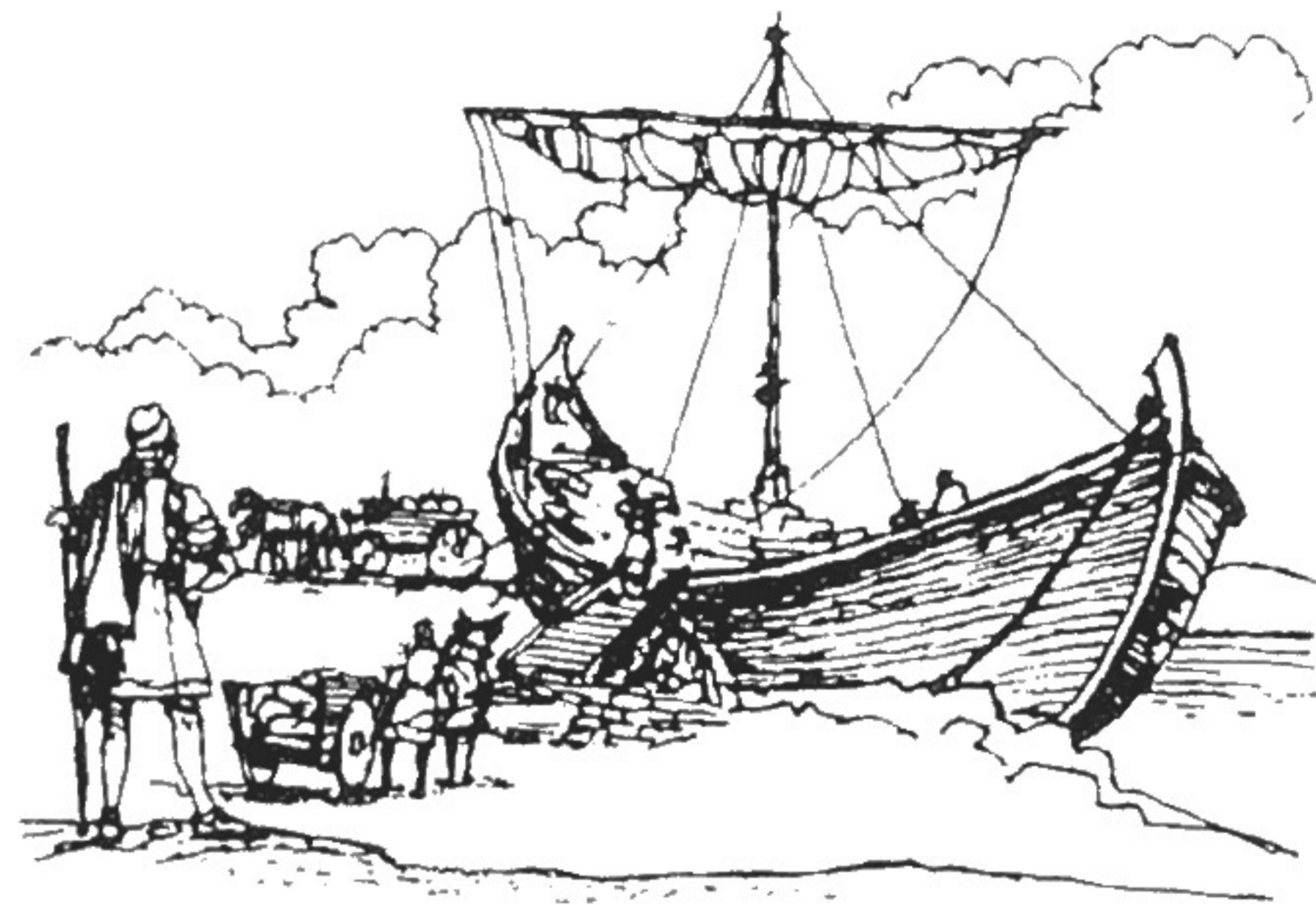
As the spinning wheel brought more cloth items to the medieval wardrobe, it also changed the nature of the material people wrote on. As clothing wore

out, the rags—mostly linen—allowed for the production of cheap paper, rather than vellum made from animal skins or expensive parchment. The result was cheaper books produced on paper.

Other items which revolutionized life in the Middle Ages were the mechanized clock (by the 1300s) and the button for clothing. By the 14th century, gunpowder had been introduced to Europe by way of China, which changed the nature of warfare and made the castle as a defensive tool obsolete.

Another trend of the period was the revival of urban life. Many towns and cities had declined or ceased to exist in the West during the Early Middle Ages. But by the 10th century, towns were back and large cities once again gained importance.

Such cities led to greater trade. This trade helped expand the economy of the High Middle Ages. Rather than just producing to survive, medieval people were now accumulating surpluses, which they sold to the East, including Constantinople and the Moslems.



In Italy, great trading cities grew and connected with the East. Leading the way were the city-states of Venice, Genoa, and Pisa. Such cities were filled with merchants, shippers, and traders who helped connect the West with the East.

Review and Write

After studying the changes brought to Europe between 1000 and 1300, make a list of what appear to be the three greatest changes, and explain why.

Monastic Life

As the power and significance of the Church in Western Europe expanded after the fall of the Roman Empire, new Christian lifestyles developed. The old Roman parish system was adopted by the Church, and local parish priests were appointed to provide spiritual guidance for the Christians in their village or locale.

In the West, many priests were illiterate; many were raised as peasants. Many priests in the early Church married and had children. Bishops often came from the unruly nobility who were frequently uncouth and illiterate themselves.

In time, the clergy—Church leaders including the local priests—developed into two distinct groups: the secular clergy, who lived in the world and interacted with people on a regular basis; and the regular clergy, which was made up of men and women known as monks and nuns. The word monk is taken from a Greek word meaning *solitary* or *alone*.

The original monks came out of Egypt and Syria in the Near East. Early monks were hermits who sometimes practiced fasting and self-torture. Others, such as St. Simeon Stylites the Elder lived on top of a stone pillar out in the Syrian desert for more than years.

Perhaps the most important outgrowth of monasticism was the establishment of monasteries in Western Europe. Benedict (480–543) was the founder of one of the first monastic systems. He established rules for monks to follow, including taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Such rules were part of what became known as the Benedictine rule. Benedict established a monastery in southern Italy at Monte Cassino, which still exists today.

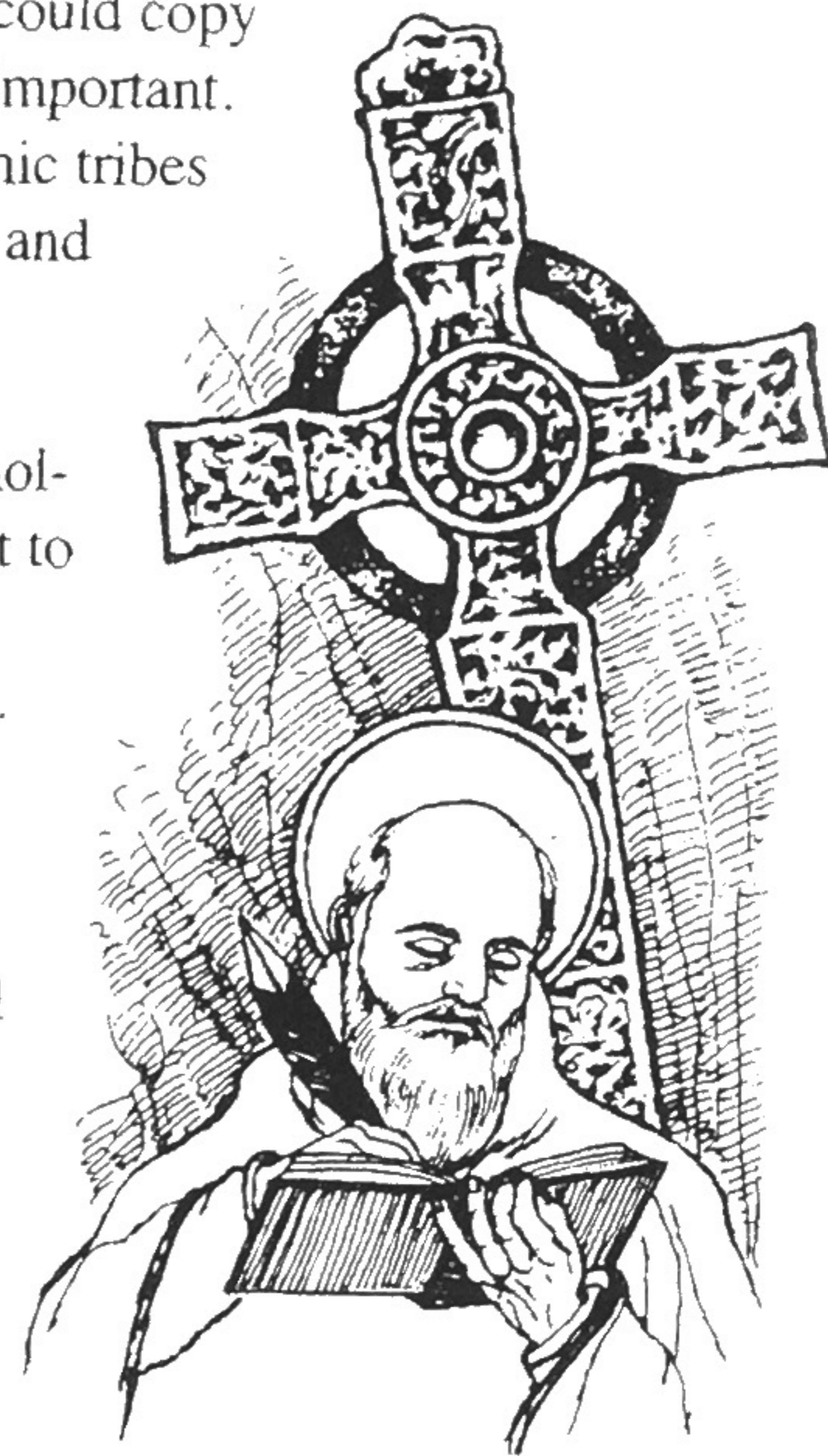
By the end of the 600s, most monasteries in the West followed the Benedictine rule. A century later, the great Frankish king, Charlemagne, required all monks to follow the rule.

From 500 to 1100, monasteries played a key role in the Western Church. In a period when few schools existed in Western Europe, the monasteries were important centers of knowledge, information, and literacy. In fact, while few people could read in Europe during the Early Middle Ages, the monasteries were home to dedicated scholars who could read, write, and copy manuscripts, especially copies of the Bible.

The printing press was not invented until the

1300s, so men who could copy the Scriptures were important. When pagan Germanic tribes harassed the Church and its clergy between A.D. 400 and 800, many monks and scholars fled the Continent to Ireland, in the northern British Isles.

During these centuries, Ireland became an important center of learning and scholarship. When few people in Gaul could read, Irish scholars could read both Greek and Latin texts.



These scholar-monks copied the Bible, as well as ancient Greek and Roman manuscripts, helping keep learning and Western heritage alive.

One of the leading Irish monks was known as the Venerable Bede (BEED), who lived from 673 to 735. Bede was raised in a monastery from age seven and spent his entire life studying, reading, copying manuscripts, and writing some of the early histories of England. He made popular the term *anno Domini*, meaning “in the year of our Lord,” abbreviated A.D.

The works of the Irish monks, such as Bede, produced some of the most beautiful books in the world. Such books were printed on animal skin called vellum, and were hand-sewn with wooden covers adorned with gold leaf and precious stones. The works produced by these monks were passed down through the ages. So beautiful were their works that people in Gothic times, during the High Middle Ages, actually thought such books had been created by angels!

Review and Write

What contributions did Benedict make to the European monastic system?

Medieval Universities

The Early Middle Ages had not witnessed great strides in learning. Schools were few. The large majority of the population of Europe could not read or write. People remained ignorant of many things in their world.

There was much superstition among the masses. Even believers in Christianity were convinced that monsters, dragons, and ogres lived in the forest. They did not think to question the existence of fairies, trolls, nymphs, and other mythical creatures. For this reason, such imaginary beings are found in popular stories we call "fairy tales."

During the High Middle Ages, however, a revival in learning and knowledge took place. Institutions of study called universities came into existence in Europe for the first time. Such places of higher learning had been founded in the Arab countries hundreds of years before and in cities such as Baghdad and Cordova, Spain. In these great centers of knowledge, Western scholars came to better understand their world and the worlds of others.

Early universities in Europe were founded by the Church. They provided the facilities to train men to serve in the growing number of administrative positions of the medieval Church and of the state. Prior to the university, monasteries and cathedral schools provided the only formal education in Europe.

The earliest chartered university in Europe was the University of Paris, founded in 1150. This was to become the center of university learning. Other institutions followed, such as Oxford University, which was established in the 1160s. By 1500, Western Europe was home to 77 universities.

These schools were different from modern universities and colleges. The typical medieval university was a guild, or organized corporation of masters. Early universities did not usually have classrooms, gymnasiums, stadiums, laboratories, dormitories, or theaters. They were often nothing more than a rented hall where students met with a master. Such students found their own lodging in the local town.

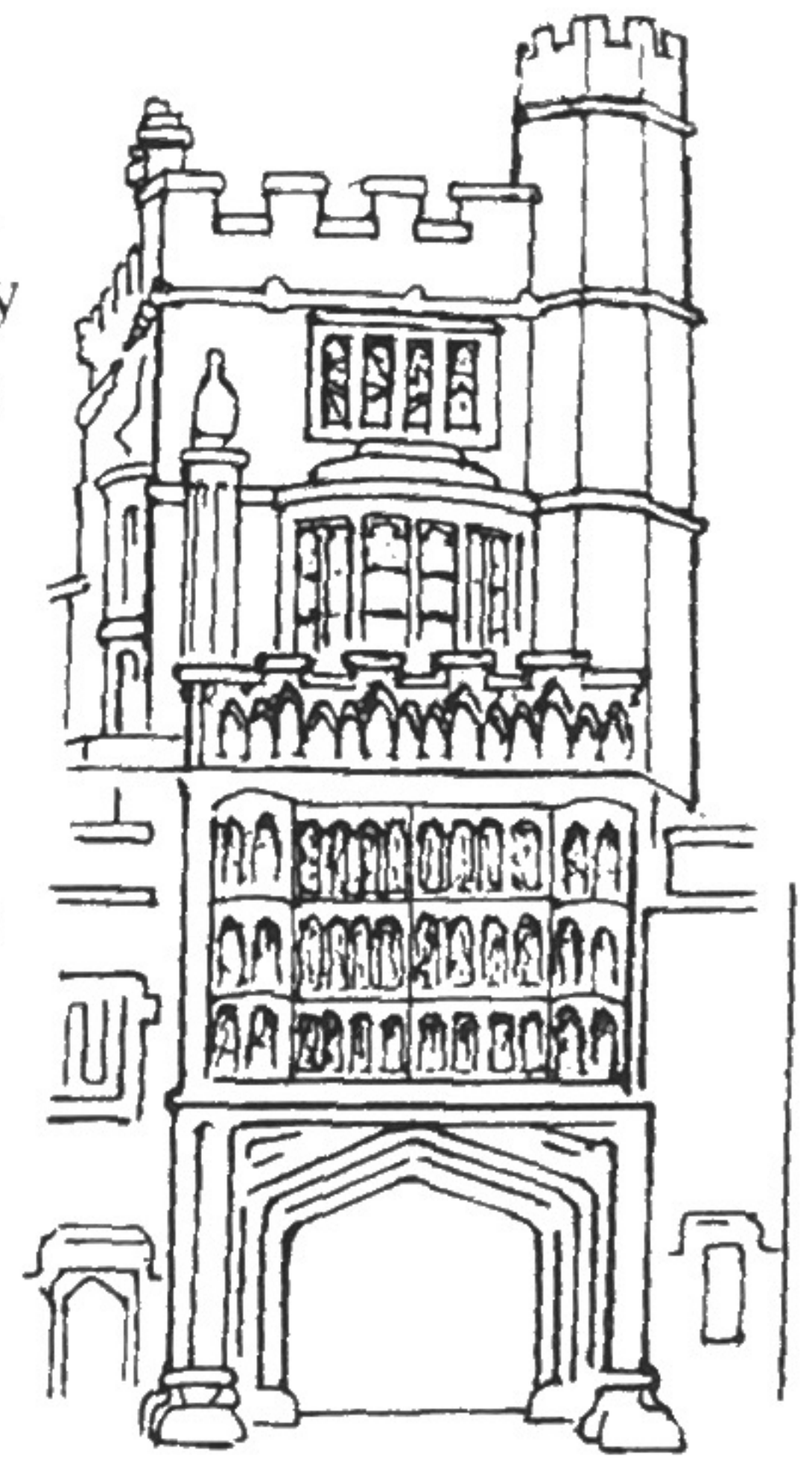
The subjects taught at a medieval university were different from the typical curriculum today. The heart of the university studies was the school of liberal arts. There were seven liberal arts, which were divided into two categories.

The Trivium consisted of the literary arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. The other four, called the Quadrivium, were the numerical arts of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.

Lectures were given in Latin. Students took notes, asked questions, and held discussions with the professor. Textbooks were not used. They were too costly.

Once a student completed his studies, he received a bachelor's degree. He might continue his university work in graduate school where he could study law, medicine, or theology. There he could earn a master's or doctoral degree.

Upon graduation, the student wore a cap and gown, much like graduates do today. In fact, the ceremonial caps, gowns, and hoods used in modern graduations date from the medieval period. In some cases, before a candidate seeking a degree could receive his, he had to provide gifts or perhaps even a banquet for his professors. In Spain, a university graduate was sometimes expected to provide a bullfight before officially graduating.



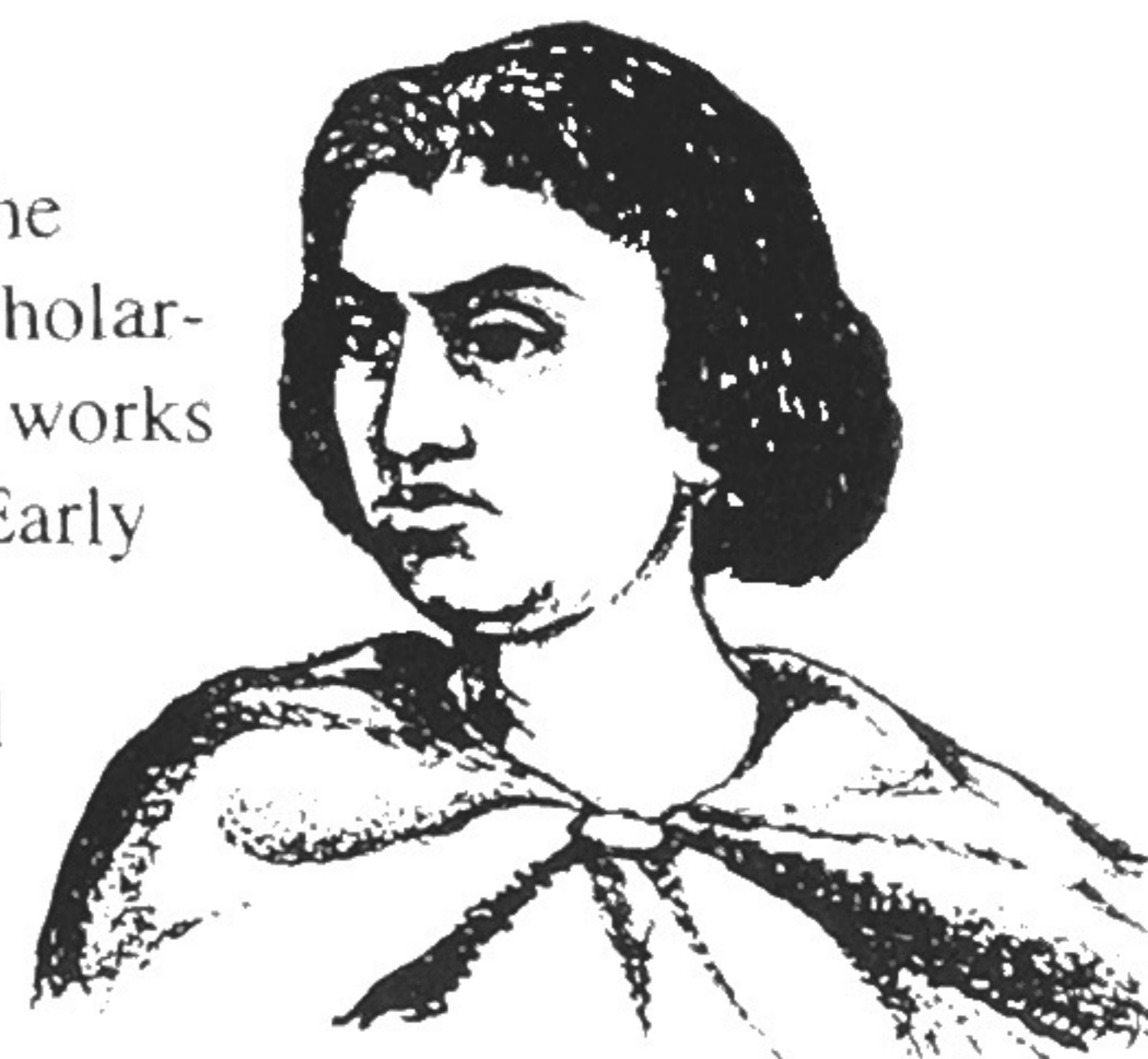
Review and Write

Name four ways in which a modern university is different from a university of the medieval period. What similarities do medieval and modern universities share?

Popular Christianity

All across Europe, the growth of universities as centers of learning during the High Middle Ages gave a renewed emphasis to literacy and a new interest in scholarship and theology. It also led to a revival in the study of classical literature, the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans, which had fallen into obscurity during the Early Middle Ages.

This new scholarship gave rise to such notable theologians as Peter Abelard (1079–1142). He was a leading philosopher and thinker of the Middle Ages. From 1113 to 1118, Abelard taught theology in Paris. He founded a school that eventually developed into the University of Paris. Abelard's studies led him to emphasize logic in the forming of ideas about one's Christianity. He said that logic may be used to understand and even to defend Christian beliefs.



Peter Abelard

Despite the rise of universities, scholarship, and other intellectual pursuits, the beliefs of most European Christians remained quite simple, even primitive. They were often as superstitious as they were faithful—perhaps more so.

Especially in rural areas, Christianity was a combination of legends and near-pagan rituals and practices, which did not mirror the official theology of the Church. Superstitions led people to believe in demons, witches, and ghosts, whose spirits returned to haunt the living.

Other practices helped to create an emotional form of Christianity that relied heavily on an imaginative theology, a blind belief, and a strong fear of the unknown. Everywhere, popular Christianity expected to see signs and miracles. Stories circulated throughout Europe of nuns who cured diseases, of bleeding statues, and other alleged demonstrations of God's power.

One powerful belief system that developed in the Middle Ages was the belief in the existence of miraculous relics. A relic was an object that connected one with power because of the source of the object. For example, when a religious person died, especially one who would soon be considered a saint, he or she left behind a physical body as well as articles which he or she possessed. Those objects, including the body, were considered in and of themselves sacred, holding great power to heal or bless the owner.

An entire cult of relics developed. Anything connected with Jesus or another Biblical figure, such as his Apostles, was considered to have the power to work miracles. There were thousands of popular relics: the Crown of Thorns worn by Jesus, wooden pieces of His Cross, hay from His stall in Bethlehem, hairs from Noah's beard, the tooth of an Apostle. Cathedrals and churches competed for such relics, for a powerful relic could attract pilgrims to their city or town.

Many of the alleged relics circulated during the medieval period were fakes, however. A pig's bones were passed off as those of a saint. And sometimes there were one, two, or three churches that might claim to have the same relic, such as the head of John the Baptist. Even some popes of the period questioned the authenticity of many of the alleged relics.

Another Christian cult which developed in the Middle Ages was known as the Mary Cult. By the 12th century, Mary, Jesus' mother, had become very popular with the masses. They began worshipping her, praying directly to her. Many stories were created about the life of Mary, nearly all of which were false.

Such belief systems were often tolerated by the leadership of the Catholic Church, which sometimes encouraged these popular forms of Christianity.

Review and Write

Why do you think so many people in the medieval Church practiced such a simple, yet superstitious, belief system?

The Great Cathedrals

With the rise of towns and urban centers in Europe during the High Middle Ages, Christian places of worship were changing in style and size. As these trading centers prospered, towns were able to afford the construction of great churches called cathedrals. Such buildings were monumental undertakings requiring much skill, labor, and great sacrifice on the part of the Christian community.

Artistically, such buildings were part of a new style of architecture called Gothic. These medieval buildings, especially cathedrals, emphasized an openness using many windows to let in massive amounts of light. Builders used tall, slender arches, and narrow columns that rose to spectacular heights.

Light was so important in a Gothic cathedral that the designers used dozens of large windows. The glass was of many colors called stained glass. Since most of the people of the medieval period were illiterate, such windows might depict a scene from the Bible or tell a story.

One of the first Gothic buildings was the abbey church of St. Denis (den NEE) near Paris. Inspired by the famous abbot Suger, St. Denis was built between 1140 and 1150. Although the Gothic style began as an architectural form in northern France, by the mid-1200s, the style was being copied all over Europe. Perhaps the French produced some of the greatest cathedrals, notably those built at Paris, Reims, Amiens, and Chartres. These cathedrals rose high above the landscapes and townscapes surrounding them. From the floor to the top of the cathedral's central corridor, or nave, Notre Dame rose 107 feet. Chartres stood at 118 feet, and Amiens' nave measured 144 feet.

One reason for the great height of the Gothic cathedrals was to take the building closer to God. Another was an ongoing rivalry between towns and cities to build the largest, tallest cathedral. Such competition was dampened in 1284 when the choir walls of a cathedral at Beauvais, France, built to a record height of 157 feet, suddenly collapsed.

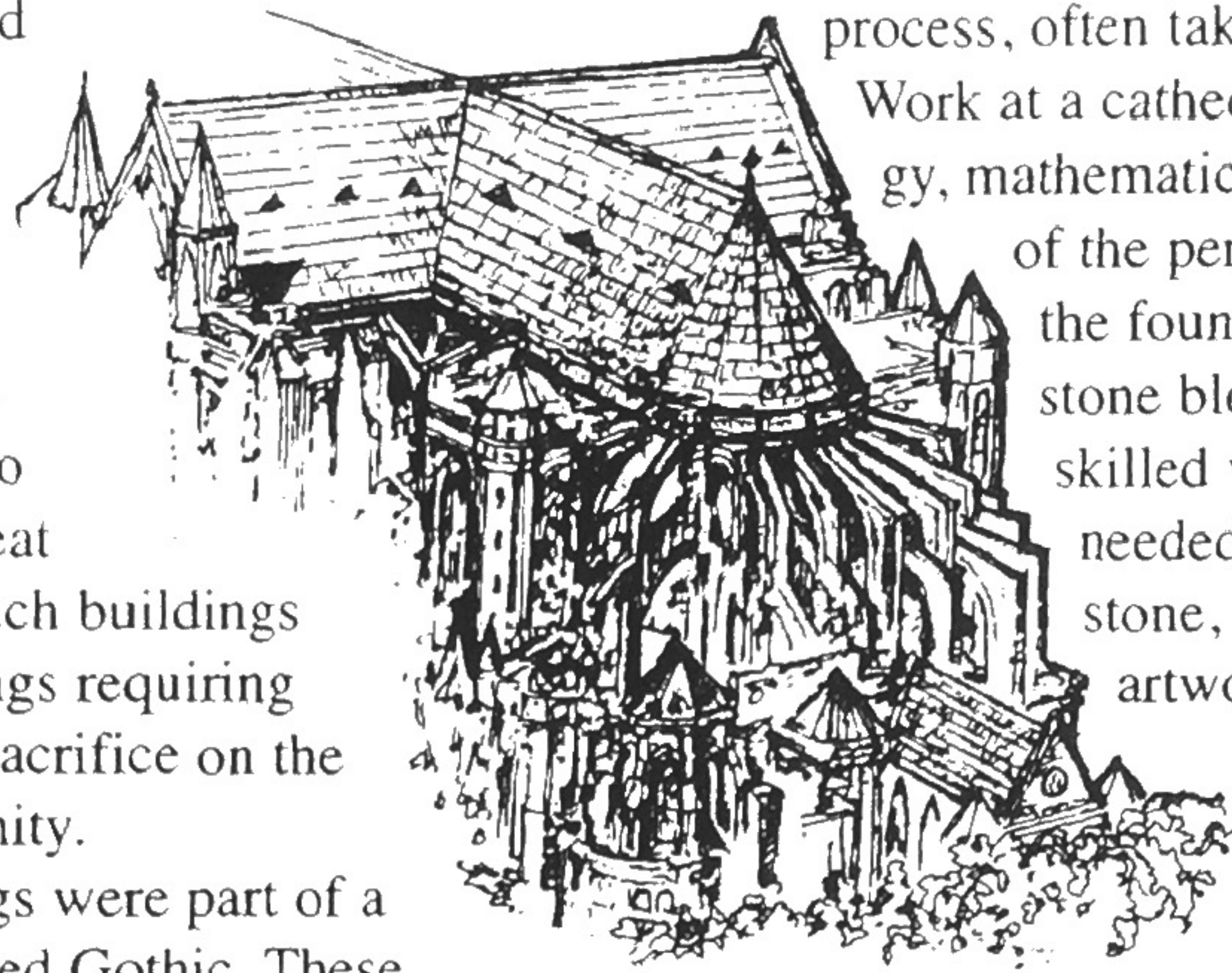
Building a cathedral was a long and difficult

process, often taking decades to complete.

Work at a cathedral site used all the technology, mathematics, and engineering knowledge of the period. Unskilled workers dug the foundations and moved massive stone blocks into place. But many skilled workers and artisans were needed to carve intricate patterns in stone, as well as create all the artwork, including stained glass, statuary, and decorations, that went into building a typical cathedral.

Hundreds of cathedrals were constructed in the High Middle Ages. In France alone, 80 cathedrals were built between 1180 and 1270. In Europe as a whole, over 500 cathedrals were built within a 400-year period.

Such great houses of worship provided a common meeting place for Christians, where often as many as 5000 of the faithful might gather for special services. The cathedrals were a symbol of pride for a community and were the sites of many pilgrimages. Inside a cathedral a relic was usually included, an object which was considered holy and meant for worship, such as a piece of Jesus' cross or the bones of a saint.



Review and Write

Give two reasons why Gothic cathedrals were constructed to such great heights?

