THE LATE MIDDLE AGES (1200 – 1500)

- THE "GOLDEN AGE" OF THE PROLETARIAT
- COMMUTATION OF LABOR SERVICES
- THE INVENTION OF PURGATORY (FEGEFEUER) & SALE OF INDULGENCES (ABLASTSHANDEL)
- HERESY – KETZEREI
- GROWING SOCIAL DIVISION
- THE HUSSITES (HUSSITEN) AND THE TABORITES (TABORITEN)
- THE CATHARS – DIE KATHARER
- THE POLITIZATION OF SEXUALITY
- WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES
- THE END OF SERFDOM
- WOMEN AT WORK
- LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT OF TOWNS
- THE BLACK DEATH & THE LABOUR CRISIS
- THE LOLLARDS & THE ENGLISH PEASANT RISING
- THE CRUSADES (KREUZZÜGE)
- HERESY AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN
- "THE NEAR WEST" - THE WORLD OF ISLAM
- CELIBACY - DAS ZÖLIBAT
- LEASE HOLDERS – PACHTBAUERN
- THE HOLY INQUISITION - DIE HEILIGE INQUISITION
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- English silver penny from around 1300 A.D.

Politically, the first outcome of the servile struggles was the concession to many villages (particularly in England, Northern Italy and France) of "privileges" and "charters" (= Satzungen). More autonomy in the running of the village community was granted, providing, at times, for true forms of local self-government. These charters abolished or at least fixed the tallage. They granted the "liberty" to sell goods at the local market and, more rarely, the right to alienate (= veräußern, verkaufen) land. Between 1177 and 1350, in Loraine alone, 280 charters were conceded.

However, the most important resolution of the master-serf conflict was the commutation (= Umwandlung) of labor services (Fronndienste) in many parts of Europe with money payments (money rents, money taxes). With this momentous development, serfdom practically ended in many parts of Europe. But the commutation of labor services functioned as a means of social division and contributed to the disintegration of the feudal village as well.

To the well-to-do peasants, commutation was a great step on the road to economic and personal independence. Possessing large tracts of land, they could earn enough money to pay the rent and to employ other laborers. The lords lessened their control over their tenants (= former serfs) when they no longer depended directly on their work. But the majority of poorer peasants - who possessed only a few acres of land barely sufficient for their survival - lost even the little they had. Compelled to pay their dues in money, they went into chronic debt, borrowing against future harvests, a process that eventually caused many to lose their land. As a result, by the 13th century, when commutations spread throughout Western Europe, social divisions in the rural areas deepened, and part of the peasantry underwent a process of proletarianization. Thirteenth-century documents contain information about an increasing number of "gardeners," landless or almost landless peasants who earned their living by hiring out their services.

Around the year 1100, the Catholic Church had become a despotic power. It governed with an iron fist and filled its coffers by numerous means of extortion. Things degenerated to the point that the clergy would not bury the dead, baptize or grant absolution from sin unless it received some compensation. The invention of Purgatory (Fegefeuer) in the 12th century had been an additional source of profit through the sales of indulgences (Ablassbriefe). Religious offices could be bought as well.

The Pope called Crusades against the heretics in the regions of Toulouse and Montpellier around 1215, as they were called to "liberate" the Holy Land from the infidels (= Ungläubige). The Crusade against the Albigensians (Cathars from the French town of Albi) was the first - but not the last - Crusade against Europeans. But the unleashing of crusades against the heretics could not undermine the "popularity of the heretic evil. There is not one commune, in which heresy does not have its supporters, its defenders and believers." Thus, in 1233, the Pope instituted a special tribunal with the function of eradicating heresy: the Holy Inquisition. The use of torture against heretics was authorized with the consensus of the main theologians of the time. Proven heretics and their protectors were to burned at the stake. The house where a heretic was discovered was to be destroyed, and the land upon which it was built confiscated.

The heretics were also known for their abhorrence for war - including the Crusades – as well as their condemnation of capital punishment. The latter provoked the Church's first explicit pronouncement in support of the death penalty. By 1210 the Church had labeled the demand for the abolition of the death penalty an heretical "error."

The trials which the Inquisition was conducting in the 1330s, in the Trento region (Northern Italy), against those who had given hospitality to the heretics when their local leader, Fra Dolcino, had passed through the area thirty years before, are portrayed in the movie "The Name of the Rose".

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- Sale of Indulgences (around 1500)

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At the root of popular heresy (Häresie) was the belief that God no longer spoke through the clergy, because of its greed and corruption. Taking the lead from the New Testament the heretics presented themselves as the "true church." The heretics taught that Christ had no property, and that if the Church wanted to regain its spiritual power it should divest itself from its possessions. They also taught that the exterior forms of worship - buildings, images, symbols - should be discarded because only inner belief mattered. They exhorted (ermunterten) people not to pay the tithes, and denied the existence of Purgatory (= Fegefeuer).

The heretic movements of the Cathars (= "Ketzer", from "Katharoi" = pure), the Waldenses (= Waldenser), and others not only reinterpreted the religious tradition. Heresy was the most important social movement of the Middle Ages. Heretics denounced social hierarchies, exploitation and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few. They played a crucial role in the anti-feudal struggle and they expressed the resistance to the growing money-economy. Many heretics shared the ideal of apostolic poverty and the desire to return to the simple communal life that had characterized early Christians. The Waldenses were owning, like the apostles, all things in common.

Its recruits came from all walks of life: the peasantry, the lower ranks of the clergy (who identified with the poor and brought to their struggles the language of the Gospel), the town burghers, and even the lesser nobility. Members of the sects could benefit from a wide support network made of schools and safe-houses. Indeed, the heretic movement was the first international organization of the oppressed, such was the reach of the sects and the links they established among themselves. This explains the ferocity with which the heretics were persecuted not only by the Church, but also by the secular authorities, who realized that the heretic appeal to the "true religion" had subversive implications and questioned the foundations of their power.

From a very early period - after Christianity became a state religion in the 4th century - the Church recognized the power that sexual desire gave women over men. The clergy tried to break the power of women by expelling women from any moment of the liturgy and by trying to usurp women's life-giving powers by adopting a feminine dress.

With the Penitentials, the handbooks that were issued since the 7th century, the Church attempted to make sexuality an object of shame and to impose a true sexual catechism by prescribing the positions permitted during intercourse (actually only one was allowed). In this process, "sexuality was invested with a new significance. It became a subject for confession, where the minutest details of one's most intimate bodily functions became a topic for discussion" as the French philosopher Michael Foucault wrote in his book "History of Sexuality." The sexual supervision escalated in the 12th century when the Lateran Councils banned the common practice of clerical marriage. The banning of clerical marriage (= celibacy, das Zölibat) was motivated by the desire of the Church to defend its property, which was threatened by too many subdivisions. At the same time, the Church also intensified its attack on "sodomy," targeting at once gay people and non-procreative sex. For the first time it condemned homosexuality for being "against nature." With the adoption of this repressive legislation, sexuality was completely politicized. Married couples were ordered to avoid sex during the Easter, Pentecost and Christmas seasons, on every Sunday of the year, on feast days prior to receiving communion and during their wife's menstrual periods.

Some heretics scorned the importance which the Church assigned to chastity. Some attributed a mystical value to the sexual act, even treating it like a sacrament ("Christeria"), and preached that practicing sex was the best means to achieve a state of innocence. The unorthodox sexual choices of the heretics must also be seen, then, as an attempt the heretics made to wrench their bodies from the grip of the clergy.
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- Female masons constructing a city wall (15th century - France)

Women's dependence on men was limited by the fact that over the authority of their husbands and fathers prevailed that of the lords, who tried to control many aspects of their lives, from work to marriage. It was the lord who was - in some areas - even claiming the "ius primae noctis" - the right to sleep with a serf's wife on her wedding night.

Since work on the servile farm was organized on a subsistence basis, all work contributed to the family's sustenance. Women worked in the fields and milked the cows, in addition to raising children, cooking, washing, spinning, and keeping an herb garden. Women's domestic activities were not devalued, as they were later, in a money-economy, when housework would cease to be viewed as "real work." As most of the work that female serfs performed was done in cooperation with other women, the sexual division of labor, far from being a source of isolation, was the basis for an intense female sociality and solidarity. This enabled women to stand up to men, despite the fact that the Church preached women's submission to men.

By the 13th century, women were leading the movement away from the countryside to the towns. Most of the women in towns were holding low-paid jobs as maids or retail traders. But while usually the poorest members of urban society, women gained access to many occupations that later would be considered male jobs. In England, seventy-two out of eighty-five guilds included women among their members. Women worked as smiths, butchers, bakers, hat-makers and ale-brewers (= Bierbrauerinnen). Some guilds, including silk-making, were dominated by them. By the 14th century, women were also becoming schoolteachers as well as doctors and surgeons. Sixteen female doctors - among them several Jewish women - were hired by the 14th century by the municipality (= Stadtverwaltung) of Frankfurt which, like other city administrations, offered its population a system of public health-care. Female doctors, as well as midwives (= Hebammen), were dominant in obstetrics (= Geburtshilfe). After the Caesarian cut (= Kaiserschnitt) was introduced in the 13th century, female obstetrics were the only ones who practiced it.

A turning point in the course of medieval history was the "Black Death", the apocalyptic plague that, between 1347 and 1352, destroyed, on an average, between 30% and 40%, of the European population. This unprecedented demographic collapse profoundly changed Europe's social and political life. In the aftermath of the "Black Death," social hierarchies were turned upside down because of the leveling effects of the widespread morbidity. Confronted with the possibility of sudden death, people no longer cared to work, but tried to have the best of times, feasting for as long as they could without thought of the future.

The most important consequence of the plague was the intensification of the labor crisis generated by the class conflict. The decimation of the work-force made labor extremely scarce and critically increased its cost, thus shifting the power relation to the advantage of the lower classes. When land had been scarce, the peasants could be controlled by the threat of expulsion. But after the population was decimated and land became abundant, the peasants could now freely move and find new land to cultivate. This stiffened the people's determination to break the shackles of feudal rule.

A symptom of this new development was the growth of rent strikes. As the manorial records laconically registered, the peasants "refused to pay". They also declared that they "will not follow the customs any longer" and ignored the orders of the lords to work for them, to repair their houses, etc. By the end of the 14th century the refusal of rent and services had become a collective phenomenon. Entire villages jointly organized to stop paying taxes and tallage and no longer recognized the commuted services (in Geldleistungen umgewandelter Frondienste).
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"We are made in the image of God, but we are treated like beasts! Ah, ye good people, matters goeth not well to pass in England, nor shall do till everything be common, and that there be no villains nor gentlemen, but that we may be united together, and that the lords be no greater masters than we be." (John Ball)

The wages of an English carpenter, expressed in kilograms of grain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEARS</th>
<th>KILOGRAMS OF GRAIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1351 - 1400</td>
<td>121,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1401 - 1450</td>
<td>155,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1451 - 1500</td>
<td>143,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1501 - 1550</td>
<td>122,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1551 - 1600</td>
<td>83,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1601 - 1650</td>
<td>48,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peasants and urban workers had already been united in the heretic movements for a common cause. This commonality (Gemeinsamkeit) of interests can be accounted for on several grounds. First, in the Middle Ages, a tight relation existed between town and countryside. Many burghers (people living in towns) were ex-serfs who had moved or fled to the town in the hope of a better life, and, while exercising their arts, continued to work the land, particularly at harvest time.

With the labour crisis following the Black Death came a new valorization of rural and urban work. The Lollards in England reminded their followers that "nobles have beautiful houses, we have only work and hardships. But it is from our work that everything comes." Undoubtedly, the appeal to the "value of work" - a novelty in a society dominated by a military class - functioned primarily as a reminder of the arbitrariness of feudal power.

In response to the increased cost of labor and the collapse of the feudal rent, attempts were made to increase the exploitation of work through the restoration of labor services. Such measures sharpened the class conflict. In England, it was an attempt by the nobility to contain the cost of labor by means of a Labor Statute limiting the maximum wage, that caused the Peasant Rising of 1381. This ended with thousands of peasants, lead by the Lollard priest John Ball, marching to London. The English rebels did not content themselves with demanding some restrictions to feudal rule. Their demand was nothing less than: "The old law must be abolished." Their aim was to put an end to the power of the lords and to feudal rule as such. And indeed, although the revolt had been militarily defeated and its leaders brutally executed, by the beginning of the 15th century, in England at least, serfdom had almost completely disappeared.

The labour crisis of the 14th century was followed by a "golden age of the European proletariat." For a broad section of the western European peasantry, and for urban workers, the late 14th and the 15th century was a period of unprecedented power. Studies of wages and living conditions in medieval England show that at no time were wages so high and food so cheap. The scarcity of labor gave the workers the upper hand and strengthened their sense of self-value. Even the condition of the landless improved after the Black Death. This was not just an English phenomenon. Wages doubled and trebled in Italy, France and Germany. In the lands of the Rhine and Danube, the daily agricultural wage became equivalent in purchasing power to the price of a pig or a sheep, and these wage rates applied to women as well, for the differential between female and male earnings was drastically reduced in the wake of the Black Death. What this meant for the European proletariat was not only the achievement of a standard of living that remained unparalleled until the 19th century, but the demise of serfdom. By the end of the 14th century, land bondage and serfdom had practically disappeared in many parts of Western Europe. Serfs were replaced by free farmers - lease holders (Zins- oder Pachtbauern) - who would accept work only for a substantial reward. "Servants are now masters and masters are servants," a writer complained in 1378.

Urban workers and artisans in many European towns even fought to gain political power. The workers at Liege (Lüttich), in nowadays Belgium, were most successful. In 1384, the nobility and the rich ("the great," as they were called), incapable of continuing a resistance which had lasted for many decades, capitulated. From then on, "the crafts completely dominated the town, becoming the arbiter of the municipal government."
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- Jan Hus was convicted of heresy at the Council of Constance and burned at the stake on July 6th, 1415.

### THE LATE MIDDLE AGES (1200 - 1500)

- Women convicted of heresy.

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The Hussites were a heretic movement named after the theologian Jan Hus aiming at the liberation of the Czech peasants from the rule of the German (and Austrian) nobility in Bohemia. Their program promoted four articles of faith:

I. Free preaching of the Word of God in the language of the common people
II. Communion in both wine and bread
III. The abolition of the clergy's dominion over temporal (= weltliche) possessions and its return to the evangelical life of Christ and the apostles
IV. The punishment of all offenses against divine law without exception of person or condition

The Taborites were the revolutionary wing of the Hussite movement. They were called Taborites after the center of their resistance, Mount Tabor. For the Taborites, the establishment of equality and communal ownership were as important as religious reform. The story has it that, on arrival from Prague, they put out large open chests in which each was asked to place his/her possessions, so that all things could be held in common.

To stamp out the revolt of the Hussites, the Church launched a Crusade in 1421. An army of 150,000, lead by duke Albrecht von Habsburg, invaded Bohemia, but they were beaten back. Hussite ideas continued to spread into Germany, and territories to the South. Another army of 100,000 was once more launched against them, in 1431, again to no avail. This time the crusaders fled the battlefield even before the battle started, on hearing the battle hymn of the dreaded Hussite troops.

What, in the end, destroyed the Taborites were the negotiations that took place between the Church and the moderate wing of the Hussites. Thus, when another crusade was launched, the moderate Hussites joined the Catholic barons in the pay of the Vatican, and defeated the Taborites in a battle in 1434.

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One of the most significant aspects of the heretic movement is the high status it assigned to women. Not surprisingly, women are present in the history of heresy as in no other aspect of medieval life. In the Church women were nothing, but in the heretic movement they were considered equal; they had the same rights as men, and could enjoy a social life and mobility (wandering, preaching) that almost nowhere else was available to them in the Middle Ages. In the heretical sects, women had the right to administer the sacraments, preach and baptize. It is reported that Waldes split from the church because his bishop refused to allow women to preach, and it is said of the Cathars that they worshipped a female figure, the Lady of Thought, that influenced Dante's conception of Beatrice. The heretics also allowed women and men to share the same dwellings, even if they were not married, since they did not fear that this would necessarily lead to promiscuous behavior. Heretical women and men often lived freely together, like brothers and sisters, as in the agapic communities of the early Christians.

Female heretics came from the most humble ranks of the serfs, and they constituted a true women's movement developing within the frame of the different heretic groups. Women also formed their own communities. A typical case was that of the Beguines, laywomen from the urban middle class who lived together (especially in Germany and Flanders), supporting themselves with their labor, outside of male control and without submitting to monastic rule. Beguines were finally condemned on suspicion of heresy in 1312, likely because of the clergy's intolerance of women who escaped male control. Female heretics are thus present in the records of the Inquisition; of some we know that they were burned, of others that they were "walled in."
For most of the Middle Ages, the economic nerve center of the world economy was the world of Islam. To get a sense of comparative economic development, consider the table to the left hand. Europeans have long been in the habit of thinking of Islam as the very definition of "the East," and, as it were, of "the other." It's easy to forget that, from the perspective of the Indian and Chinese tradition, the difference between Christianity and Islam is almost negligible. Medieval Islamic philosophers studying Aristotle and Plato were trying to square religious tradition beginning with Abraham and Moses with categories of Greek philosophy and scientific rationalism. For that cause, it is much more sensible to see Judaism, Christianity and Islam as three different manifestations of the same great Western intellectual tradition.

For the Chinese, the world of Islam surely was the "Near West" as compared to Europe, which was the "Far West." The prevailing Islamic attitude toward law, government and economic matters was the exact opposite of that prevalent in China. Chinese Confucians were suspicious of governance through strict codes of law, preferring to rely on the inherent sense of justice of the cultivated scholar assumed to also be a government official. Medieval Islam, on the other hand, enthusiastically embraced law, but tended to view government as an unfortunate necessity. In part it was because of the peculiar alliance between merchants and common people that became aligned against the Arab military leaders, the small layer of people with the political and military power. The Arab military leaders who, after Mohammed's death in 632 AD, conquered the Sassanian empire and established the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, always continued to see themselves as people of the desert, and never felt entirely part of the urban civilizations they had come to rule. The various schools of Islamic law created their own educational institutions and their own system of religious justice, embedded in society and independent from the state. The "ulema", the legal scholars and teachers, were to become the principal agents in the conversion of the bulk of the population to Islam. They contributed to the creation of a "wall" between civil society, organized around the twin poles of mosque and bazaar, on the one side, and the state and the government on the other. The legal system created by the "ulema" ensured that it was effectively impossible for Muslims - or for that matter Christians or Jewish subjects of the Caliphate - to be reduced to slavery. Slavery through debt or the sale of children were forbidden.