

6 Going to Towns

Not all medieval Europeans lived on manors. By the eleventh century, many had moved to towns. The growth of towns was partly inspired by an extraordinary event—the First Crusade.

In the 1070's, a group of Muslims from central Asia captured Syria and Palestine. They threatened the city of Constantinople (con-stan-tuh-NO-pel), now Istanbul (is-tan-BOOL).

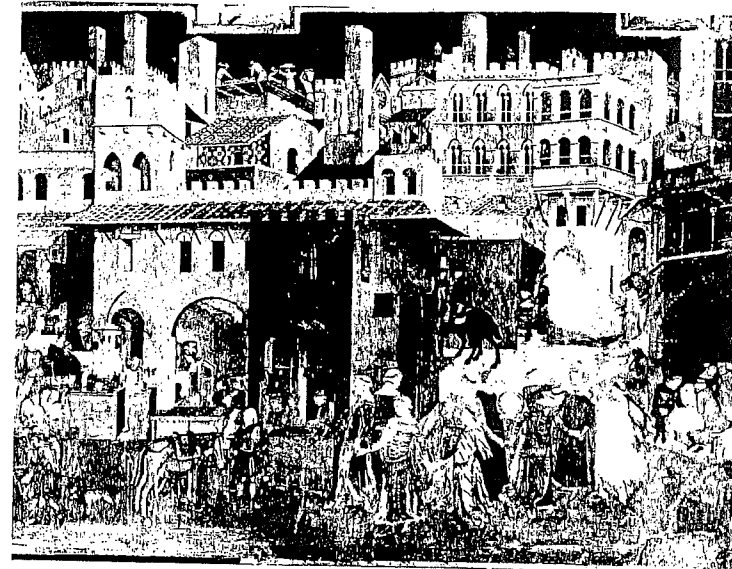
Constantinople was the center of the Byzantine (BIZ-in-teen) Empire. This empire was the successor to the earlier one ruled by Rome. Constantinople was also the seat of the Eastern Orthodox Church. As such, it was a major center of Christian culture. The Byzantine emperor asked Pope Urban II for help in driving the Muslims out of the Holy Land. The emperor expected a small band of paid soldiers. Instead, the pope sent an enormous army of volunteers.

Crusaders swarm over a medieval city. In the Middle Ages, many wars were fought and lives lost in the name of Christianity.

These volunteers were the first *crusaders*. They had many different reasons for joining the Crusades. Many were more interested in capturing territory in the Middle East than helping the Byzantine emperor protect his empire.

The Crusades were also opportunities for Christians to make *pilgrimages*, or journeys to holy places. Usually these places were holy because a saint had lived and performed miracles there. Tours and St. Foy in France were popular places for Christian pilgrims. The crusaders often passed through these places on their way to Jerusalem, the most important holy place.

It was believed that crusaders to Jerusalem received a reward for it in heaven. People also went on the Crusades as penance for their sins. Since the trip was so long and difficult, anyone who returned from Jerusalem was honored.



Lorenzetti's painting of Siena entitled "Effects of Good Government" reveals a certain coziness in the tightly layered life within the walls of a medieval town.

The First Crusade was a success from a military standpoint, and a triumph for the Church. The crusaders helped the Byzantine emperor protect his empire. In addition, they captured Jerusalem and some surrounding areas. Some crusaders stayed and settled in crusader states, lead by Christian rulers.

Inspired by this success, Europeans went on eight more crusades. However, they were unable to gain new territories.

Muslim armies became more powerful. Jerusalem fell to the Turkish Muslims in 1188. Afterwards, the remaining crusader states crumbled.

Towns and Trade. Although the Crusades were military failures, they were economic triumphs. How was this so? The crusaders brought back foreign goods from their journeys. This sparked a demand for trade. Transportation was improving, and travel in Europe was be-

coming less dangerous. Many people were able to go regularly to markets and trade fairs. Towns soon grew up at these trading centers—towns such as Ghent in northern Europe and Genoa (JEN-uh-wuh) in Italy.

Another reason for the growth of towns in Europe was that farmers were now producing *surplus*, or extra, crops. This meant that not everyone was needed to produce food. So some people became shoemakers or silversmiths. Others specialized in woolen cloth or wine-making. Some areas became famous for

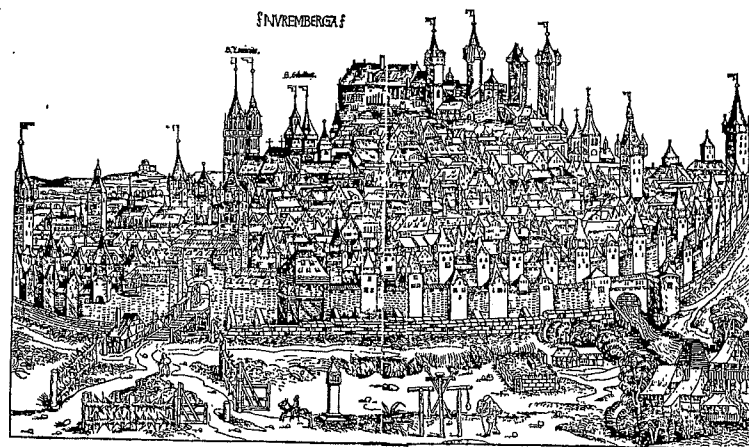
one product, and towns developed around the making of that product.

Geography often influenced where new towns would appear. An area near a river, harbor, bridge, or crossroads was a likely place. So was land near a castle or monastery. Such locations were easy to defend.

High Hopes. The same strong faith that sent people on crusades also inspired them to build great churches, or *cathedrals* in many towns. Building a cathedral was expensive and very difficult.

All kinds of people worked on cathe-

Shops selling wares of many kinds lined the streets of medieval towns. This covered market offers shoes, cloth, silver, and gold.



Medieval towns were built for trade, but not without considering defense. Fifteenth-century Nuremberg, Germany was well guarded by its walls and moat.

drals. Nobles pulled wagons, peasants cut stone blocks. Some of these stone blocks weighed more than a ton. They were brought to the cathedral site in big wagons. People pulled the wagons with long ropes tied around their chests. It took about 150 people, straining with all their might, to pull one wagon.

Why did Christians willingly do the work of animals to build a cathedral? They believed that they would be rewarded in heaven for their work. Also, the results were worth it. Many of the cathedrals built in the Middle Ages were very beautiful. They were the tallest buildings in Europe until modern times. Some were higher than a 30-story build-

ing. To the people of the Middle Ages, these cathedrals seemed to reach toward heaven.

Cathedrals were not only huge, they were beautifully decorated. Most cathedrals had great glass windows of many different colors. These colored windows often showed people and scenes from the Bible. Because most churchgoers could not read, they learned Bible stories by "reading" the windows. They also admired the paintings, carpets, and statues decorating the cathedrals.

It took about 50 years to build a cathedral, and some took much longer. One reason was that they cost a lot of money. When a town ran out of money, work on

the cathedral stopped. Another reason was pride. Each town wanted to build a bigger cathedral than its neighbor. So cathedrals kept getting taller and grander. Some were never finished.

Above all, cathedrals were built to last. One particularly fine example is the cathedral of Chartres, France. It was built three times, beginning in the ninth century. Fire nearly destroyed it four times. The fifth time, the people of Chartres built it to last. It is made of stones carefully balanced on each other to create *Gothic*, or pointed, arches, pillars, and domes.

Construction on the final cathedral began in the twelfth century. Although the basic structure of the building was completed by the fourteenth century, new towers, steeples, and spires were added much later. To this day, the town is proud of its cathedral, and it is carefully maintained. It has survived eight centuries with hardly a scratch.

Freedom in Towns. Many great cathedrals were built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They were a sign that Europe's towns were coming to life. The people also built strong walls around their new towns for protection. Many people won their freedom from feudal lords. Sometimes they paid the lords for the right to govern themselves. Other times they fought for it. Before long, there was a popular saying: "Towns breathe free air." Many serfs ran away to towns to become free.

Medieval towns were busy places, but they were dirty and smelled of garbage.

Usually they had open sewers, and garbage was often thrown in the streets. Diseases were common, and epidemics killed many people. The houses were built mainly of wood and were very close together. If a house caught fire, the whole town might burn down.

But diseases, epidemics, and fires did not stop the towns from growing quickly. Some became overcrowded. Then the old walls were torn down, and larger ones were built so that the town could spread out. Houses were made taller and taller, until, at times, they collapsed.

The people of the towns were proud of their freedom and of their success in business. Many of them wished to thank and honor God for these blessings. The best way they knew was to build a cathedral to God's glory.

Quick Check

1. Why did Christian volunteers go to the Middle East? What were these volunteers called? Give two reasons why people volunteered.
2. How many groups went? Which one, or ones, were successful militarily?
3. How did the Crusades contribute to the growth of towns? What other conditions helped towns to grow?
4. How long did it take to build a cathedral? Name two reasons why it took so long. What famous cathedral in France was built five times?
5. Describe a medieval town. What were some of the hazards of living in one?

