<u>Life in the High Middle Ages</u>

<u>Trading Centers and the Hanseatic League</u>

Two areas in Western Europe whose prosperity was owed to the rebirth of trade was Flanders, in modern Belgium and northern France and the cities of Italy. Italian cities like Venice developed a fleet of trading ships and became a major trade center by the end of the tenth century. While Venice and other Italian cities were busy trading in the Mediterranean, Flanders controlled trade in the north. Its success resulted from its location as the hub of trade routes that traveled across France, down the Rhine River in modern Germany, across the English Channel, and south from the Baltic Sea. Flanders, which produced fine woolen cloth from British raw wool, eventually became the textile headquarters of Europe.

The Germanic cities of Hamburg, Lubeck, and Bremen, all commercial centers on the North and Baltic Seas, formed the Hanseatic League. Eventually adding more than seventy cities to its membership, the league set up permanent trading centers in Flanders, Russia, England, and Scandinavia. The league ensured free trade among its members, eliminated piracy from the northern seas, and established regulations for fair trade. Markets and fairs also supplied avenues for the exchange for goods. Some European feudal lords set up fairs to sell imported goods and gained income by charging taxes on merchandise sold.

By the 12th century, trade developed between Flanders and Italy. As trade increased, demand for gold and silver coins arose. A money economy slowly began to emerge. A <u>money economy</u> is an economic system based on money rather than barter. Trading companies and banking firms were set up to manage the sale of goods. All of these practices were part of the rise of <u>commercial capitalism</u>, an economic system in which people invest in trade and goods in order to make profits.

1. Why was the city of Flanders important?

2. What was the Hanseatic League?

3. Why was commercial capitalism significant?

<u>The Growth of Towns</u>

Most people worked as farmers during the beginning of the Middle Ages because most of the population was needed to farm the land for food. As farming methods improved in the eleventh century, more people were able to leave their farms and earn their living by becoming craftsmen and traders. As these people came together to practice their trades, they formed the first towns.

The people in towns were free; they owed service and obedience to no lord. Instead, the people paid a tax to the lords who owned the land on which the town stood. The town's government was led by a lord mayor and a council. These mayors and councilmen were generally chosen from among the wealthiest of the craftsmen and traders and they zealously guarded the rights and privileges of their town against outsiders. Towns were almost always fortified with high stone walls that encircled the town and patrolled by guards in case the lord decided to go back on his agreement.

Inside the walls were a myriad of specialized industries such as weaving, leather working, bakers and shoemaking, which provided many new jobs and many new goods. Merchants established new shops in the growing towns where there were many customers. Guards were needed to patrol the town walls and keep the peace, and musicians were needed to play at feasts and in civic processions. Bankers and lawyers arrived and set up there shops, developing a new middle class. There was no room for town

residents to grow food, so peasants from the countryside came to sell their produce in markets and buy the specialized goods of the town at least once a week. Sometimes serfs tried to hide in the towns. If they could stay for one year and one day without their lords finding them, the serf would become a freeman. Towns helped to usher in new goods and new luxuries. They also helped to increase the quality of goods produced through regulation by trade guilds and ushered in the end of feudalism by providing people with options other than farming.

1. Describe the town's government, businesses and social life.

Manufacturing and Banking

In addition to the diversion and contacts provided through markets and fairs, the High Middle Ages also saw the rise of manufacturing, banking, and investment. Early manufacturing in Western Europe was based on the domestic system, in which goods were produced in the homes of workers. Manufacturers would supply raw materials to home workers, who would then produce the finished product. Money changers often turned to money lending, charging excessive interest rates. The Roman Catholic Church's prohibition of charging interest, or usury, had left most money changing to non-Christians during the early Middle Ages. To facilitate transporting money from one location to another along trade routes, letters of credit that somewhat resembled checking accounts were issued. As time went on, the capital earned through banking and money lending activities was often invested in enterprises such as shipbuilding, giving rise to a market economy in which entrepreneurs would combine land, labor, and capital to engage in manufacturing and business ventures.

1. Explain the banking system of the High Middle Ages.

Guilds

As more people became craftsmen, people of the same craft began to band together. They found that together they could do more than any one of them alone could, so they began an organization called a guild. Each line of business had its own guild, butchers, bakers, tanners, and many others. The guild's purpose was to make sure its members produced high quality goods and were treated fairly. These guilds became very powerful in towns toward the end of the Middle Ages. They began to pass many laws that controlled competition among merchants, fixed prices and wages, and limited the hours during which merchandise could be sold. If a stranger came to town, he could not sell his goods unless he paid a toll and obeyed the guilds rules. The guild also took care of the widow and children of a merchant who died and punished members who use false weights or poor materials.

Guilds also ensured that new crafters were properly trained. A boy began his career as an apprentice. His parents sent him to a master in the craft he was to learn. For a period that varied from three to eleven year, the boy lived as a part his master's household, doing menial chores and learning his trade. After a boy served his apprenticeship, he became a journeyman or a day worker for his master. In order to become a master himself and join a guild, he had to demonstrate his skill in his craft by creating a "masterpiece" that was approved of by the guild. He also had to have enough money set aside to open his own shop.

1. What was the role of guilds?

2. How did they work?

Commune of Richirzegcheide: Grant of a Gild to the Carpenters, 1180

The carpenters' industry was of great importance in the days when timber was used so plentifully in the construction of houses. It was all the more so by reason of the increasing size of towns. Hence the carpenters soon organized themselves, charging an admission fee, regulating their social and fraternal activities, making rules for apprenticeship and membership, and protecting themselves and their customers from injustice. As was often the case on the continent, they received their charter from the city corporation.

. . . Be it known . . . that in those times in which Theoderic and Henry Flaco were mayors of the citizens, they, with the advice and common consent of the officials of Richirzegcheide, agreed for the honor of St. John the Evangelist, for the sake of usefulness, to concede a fraternity to the carpenters who were petitioning them. And this was approved in the City Hall in the presence of the officials of Richirzegcheide. They shall have this fraternity by this law; that every carpenter wishing to join the said fraternity will give twelve solidi for the fraternity. And it was decreed that every apprentice, should pay four solidi on his entry. But others who are not of the craft of these brethren, and who wish to have the said fraternity, will give twenty-four denarii for the same fraternity. Also they ought to enjoy this law, that, whatever man or woman of the fraternity should depart this life, there will be given for his obsequies at death four pounds of wax; and, for his vigil, six men, who will watch diligently, are appointed; and, to his burial the men and women who are of the fraternity shall all be compelled to come. He who neglects to watch when he is ordered will give two denarii for satisfaction. Whoever is unwilling to be present at the funeral of a brother or sister, as has been said, will pay just as much.

Also it has been decreed that whatever guest or citizen sells the timber or other merchandise of the brethren to another, and does not pay for it on the next day at the latest, if the seller makes a complaint about it, whatever brother remains a debtor in such a way shall give ten denarii to the brethren for satisfaction. Also it has been decreed that if any of the said brethren who are said to be carpenters shall give their work to a guest or citizen, or shall promise him work, and then delay more than two weeks, if it be a citizen or guest who is impeded in this way, and if he complain about it, then the brother who hindered him by delay shall pay ten denarii for satisfaction to the brethren. Witnesses, etc.

Source. From: F. Keutgen, ed., *Urkunden zur Städtischen Verfassungsgeschichte,*(Berlin: Emil Felber, 1901), p. 353; reprinted in Roy C. Cave & Herbert H. Coulson, eds., *A Source Book for Medieval Economic History,* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1936; reprint ed., New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1965), pp. 238-239.

1. What are some of the duties of the carpenter based on this document?

2. What is the purpose of this document?

3. Why are these documents necessary?