URBANISATION IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE
The first urbanization in Europe occurred during antiquity (500 B.C. – 500 A.D.) around the Mediterranean region. The share of urban population reached some 10–20 % in the centuries around the birth of Christ. The most urbanized areas were the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, North Africa (modern Tunisia), the Apennine Peninsula (modern Italy), and the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula, most of which were areas of quite modest rainfall. In this period the archaeological and written sources become richer.
Demographic history of Europe

The population levels of Europe during the Middle Ages can be roughly categorized:

200–600 (Late Antiquity): population decline

600–1000 (Early Middle Ages): stable at a low level, with intermittent growth.

1000–1250 (High Middle Ages): population boom and expansion.

1250–1348 (Late Middle Ages): stable or intermittently rising at a high level, with fall in 1315-17.

1348–1420 (Late Middle Ages): steep decline.

1420–1470 (Late Middle Ages): stable or intermittently falling to a low level.

1470–onward: slow expansion gaining momentum in the early 16th century.

Activities

Remember

1. When did urbanisation first begin in Europe?

Understand

2. Explain the link between the data in the two data tables. Are they linked? If so, how? Why do you think they are linked?

Apply

3. How would the interconnections between places have increased urbanisation in the world from 1790 – 2000?

Analyse

4. Why was there a large population decline in the early 1300s? What were the effects of this population decline?

Create

5. Choose five countries from either data table and create a line graph.
   - Write at least two sentences explaining the data
The Rise of Towns

Compared to today, there were few towns in medieval Europe, and those that did exist were tiny. Medieval towns were usually smaller than those in classical antiquity. In 1100 or 1200 a town with 2000 inhabitants was considered large. Only a few towns and cities in Europe had more than 10,000, and those with more than 50,000 were very rare: even the city of Rome only had around 30,000. In 1066 London, by far the largest city in England, is estimated to have had 10,000 inhabitants, though four hundred years later it was probably nearer 75,000. The biggest concentrations of large towns in medieval Western Europe were in Flanders (modern-day Belgium), and (much more so) in north Italy.

A second great factor in the passing of the Middle Ages was the rise of new towns. The Roman Empire had encouraged the building of towns, but the German barbarians refused to live in confinement. When they swept through the empire they settled on the land and, later, built manors, castles, and villages. As each baronial stronghold was self-sufficient, there was little need for trade except for the few articles carried by traveling merchants. Without trade, most old Roman towns dwindled or even died. They lost their right to self-government and became the property of the barons. The town dwellers did almost no manufacturing. They lived by tilling the land. In the 11th century, however, the Crusades began to stimulate the revival of commerce. Traveling merchants established headquarters in places of safety, such as by the walls of a castle or monastery. Places accessible to main roads or rivers grew rapidly.

Wherever merchants settled, labourers and artisans came. Carpenters and blacksmiths made chests and casks for the merchants’ goods, and carts to transport them. Shipbuilders turned out trading vessels. Butchers, bakers, and brewers came to supply food for the workers, and tailors and shoemakers came to supply clothes. Others came to make the wares of trade.
By the 13th century Europe was dotted with towns. Few had as many as 10,000 people. The towns were introducing a new kind of life into medieval Europe, however, for the townspeople now lived by the exchange of goods and services. They were no longer self-sufficient like the small groups of peasants on the manors were; they had to develop a lifestyle based on the idea of exchange. This organization laid the foundations for modern economic and social living.

As the cities grew rich they sought the right to govern themselves. The first to free themselves from the power of feudal lords were in Italy--Venice, Pisa, Genoa, Florence, and others. Towns in France were next to gain power, then towns along the Rhine Valley and on the Baltic coast, where cities of the Hanseatic League grew to enormous wealth and strength. Some of the towns bought their freedom from the nobles and the church; others fought bitter battles to win it. A few were given it.

In the towns the houses were packed together because every town had to be a fortress, with stout, high walls and a moat or river to protect it from hostile nobles, pirates, and robber bands. The smaller the walled enclosure, the easier it was to defend. The only open places were the market square in the town centre, the cathedral, and the few gardens of the rich. Main streets led like spokes of a wheel from the market to the few gates in the walls. Building room was so cramped that the houses were built in several narrow stories, the upper floors jutting over the alley like streets.

Few streets were paved. In wet weather people floundered almost knee-deep in mud. The street was the only sewer. It sloped to the centre, and refuse and chamber waste were flung into it. Pigs rooted in the odorous filth.

Wells, springs, and rivers were the only
water supply. They were unprotected and untreated, so that plagues were frequent.

Houses were uncomfortable. Most of them had a mere framework of heavy timbers. The wall spaces were filled with woven reeds daubed with clay or plaster. Rushes or straw usually lined the floors. Fireplaces had chimneys, and the peril of sparks on the thatched roofs was one of the worst hazards of town living. The house of the average citizen served multiple functions as his dwelling, factory, and shop. Goods were made and sold on the ground floor. The owner and his family lived on the floor above. The upper stories of the house were storage rooms and sleeping lofts for the workmen.

At night the medieval city was dark and dangerous. There were no street lights. People who ventured out at night took along one or two workmen with lanterns and weapons as a protection against robbers. In some cities cables were strung across streets to hinder fleeing criminals.

Few working citizens, however, went out at night. The workday began at sunrise and ended at sunset. At 8 or 9 PM the cathedral bell tolled the curfew. This was the signal to cover all fires with ashes to lessen the peril of houses catching fire in the night.

Activities

Remember

1. Which towns had more than 10,000 people in 1200 CE?

Understand

2. Explain how the Romans helped cause more urbanisation in Europe.

Apply

3. In Medieval towns, houses were packed together. Why? How are the houses laid out in your suburb? Why do you think this is?

Analyse

4. What factors decided how houses were built in Medieval Europe? Why do you think these were the most important factors?

Create

5. On a simple map of Europe, show the five biggest towns/cities in Medieval Europe. Then in a different colour, show where the five biggest towns/cities are now. Make sure you include a legend on your map.
Medieval Towns

There were few towns in Medieval England and those that existed were very small by our standards. Most people in Medieval England were village peasants but religious centres did attract people and many developed into towns or cities.

Outside of London, the largest towns in England were the cathedral cities of Lincoln, Canterbury, Chichester, York, Bath, Hereford etc. That these cities were big can be explained simply because they were cathedral cities. These cities attracted all manner of people but especially traders and pilgrims. After the death of Thomas Becket in 1170, Canterbury Cathedral became a very special place of pilgrimage visited by thousands of people each year.

The Domesday Book of 1087 only included six towns in its enquiry. By the time of Medieval England, we do not have accurate figures for these towns and cities as no count was ever made of population and the figure would have changed throughout the year in all large towns and cities.

The big market fairs would have seen an increase in population and it may well have fallen after one had finished. Tax registers – such as the one that helped to spark off the Peasants Revolt of 1381 – were inaccurate as those who could get away with not registering did! If you were not on a tax list, you did not have to pay tax.

Medieval towns tended to grow around areas where people could easily meet, such as crossroads or rivers. Towns needed more water than villages, so a nearby water supply was vital. Rivers would provide the water used for washing and drinking and they were used for the disposal of sewage (if it had not been simply thrown into the streets).
Village people came to towns to trade therefore those who were in charge of a town had to do what was needed to ensure that their town was safe. Many towns had large fences built around them and the gates of these fences were locked at night to keep out undesirables. Cities such as York and Canterbury had city walls that served the same purpose – but a town would not have had enough wealth to build such an expensive protection.

A successful town attracted many merchants to it. Many towns were owned by a lord and it was in his interest to ensure that his town was popular with merchants as they paid tax. The more merchants in a town, the more tax a lord could collect. Taxes were collected by a sheriff. As many people could not read or write, the system was open to abuse and corruption. This is why many people in towns wanted to get a charter.

A charter gave people in a town certain rights that were clearly stated in the charter that town had. Many charters gave towns the right to collect their own taxes thus removing corrupt sheriffs from doing so. It was also common for a town to ask for its own law court so that legal problems could be settled quickly.

Towns were dirty places to live in. There was no sewage system as we would know it today. Many people threw toilet waste into the street along with other rubbish. Rats were very common in towns and cities and lead to the Black Death of 1348 to 1349. Towns might use pigs to eat what rubbish there was. Water was far from clean as a local river would have been polluted with toilet waste thrown into it from villages both upstream and downstream. Therefore, as people would have used this as a source of water (they had no other choice) and because people knew little about health and hygiene, disease was common. Life expectancy could be short. Life for a poor person in a town or city was described as “nasty, brutal and short”.

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** Médieval Trade **

- Towns holding fairs
- Major commercial centers
- Major trade routes

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** Medieval Trade Map **

[Map showing medieval trade routes and centers]
As homes were made of wood, fire was another danger in a town or city. Walking in a town at night could also be dangerous. Though towns had a **curfew** (a time when everyone had to be in their homes) no town had a police force to deal with those who broke the law. No town had street lights – the only choice was candles but in a wooden city or town, these ‘street lights’ could prove disastrous.

Building in a medieval town was expensive as land cost a great deal. That is why many medieval houses that exist today appear odd in that they have a small ground floor, a larger second floor and an even larger top floor as builders built up and out. This kept the cost down.

Shops attracted people to a town. The shops also doubled as a home for the craftsman that worked in it. A sign outside of the shop showed people what that person did for a living. Signs had to be used as so few people could read or write.

**Activities**

**Remember**

1. Why were some English cities bigger than others during the Middle Ages?

**Understand**

2. Explain the benefits and disadvantages of building a town near a river.

**Apply**

3. Look at the Medieval Trade routes map. What patterns in the trade routes can you see? What reasons might there be for the trade routes going in these directions?

**Analyse**

4. Perform COPAS analysis on the black and white image of people in the street.

**Create**

5. Create a list of (at least 8) interview questions that you might ask a peasant who was thinking about moving into a city? What kind of things would be ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factors for him or her?
Once the invasions were over and peace was restored to Europe, trade gradually began to revive. Roads into the interior became less dangerous and merchants began to travel more frequently along them.

Commerce in the early period of revival was largely in the hands of the Jewish merchants. They had the advantage of commercial contacts with the Jewish communities within both the Islamic and Byzantine Empires. These contact would also and share with them a knowledge of commercial techniques and contracts.

Money came back into circulation although where it came from is not quite clear since there was little mining of gold or silver till the end of the Middle Ages.

Merchants began to establish their head-quarters, often in the old deserted towns or near the residence of bishops or feudal lords because it was there that customers lived. Craftsmen thereupon began to move from the overcrowded manors so as to produce their wares in the new towns where lords and merchants would be willing to buy them.

As the process began to snowball, so the population increased and the need grew for food to be brought to them. That would be provided by the manors which in turn needed money to buy goods which the craftsmen were now making in town and no longer on the manors.

A busy local trade therefore began to grow until by about 1100 there was a commercial centre at every 20 to 30 miles.

The merchants and craftsmen in the towns had no desire to remain the subjects of their neighbouring feudal lords. The aristocratic warlords were no angels and failed to understand the needs of the town. Moreover, they tended to overtax the townspeople and rob the merchants who were plying their trade.

The merchants in turn had no form of protection because feudal and customary law did not deal with commercial problems. They therefore began to evolve their own mercantile law but needed the necessary machinery to supervise its enforcement.

They struggled to gain recognition of their own law, law-courts, judges and magistrates. Moreover, they
sought independence to govern their own towns, avoid feudal taxation and the payment of fees to feudal lords.

The Italian towns were the first to achieve such independence as early as during the Saracen and Magyar invasions. The Lombard counts were too weak to protect the urban population.

Under the leadership of the various bishops, therefore, the burghers saw to their own defence which forced the counts to grant them exemption from their jurisdiction.

Towns which were close to each other and could therefore support one another were the most successful in liberating themselves and becoming semi-republics, e.g. those of northern Italy, the upper Danube and Rhine Rivers, Flanders and the Baltic coast.

Towns such as Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Florence and Milan became virtual city-states and sometimes even dominated the countryside about them.

Many of the towns had to fight for their charters of liberty from the feudal lords. Sometimes this meant resorting to urban riots and revolts to achieve their ends. Many of the feudal lords, however, saw the economic advantage of granting such and some actually founded and chartered new towns on their own initiative.

The development of the towns and the increase in the economy meant peasants could start selling their surplus produce. That increased their motivation to produce in excess of local consumption which led to the development of better methods of cultivation, better ploughs, more efficient harnesses. It also led to a better quality crop on soil which was becoming increased in fertility.

**Activities**

**Remember**

1. How far was it (in kilometres) between commercial centres by about 1100 CE?

**Understand**

2. Why did merchants not want cities ruled by the upper class?

**Apply**
3. List (at least 5) effects on the environment the new technologies and urbanisation in the Middle Ages would have had?

Analyse

4. Money increased in circulation in the Middle Ages, and it isn't clear why. What kind of information could a historian find that would provide an answer?

Create

5. Draw a map of Italy and mark out all the Italian cities mentioned in the text. Suggest why the location of these cities was important for them becoming powerful.

Urbanization in the Islamic World

The city of Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasid Leaders and a major centre of learning and trade in the world.

As urbanization increased, Muslim cities grew unregulated, resulting in narrow winding city streets and neighbourhoods separated by different ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations. Suburbs lay just outside the walled city, from wealthy residential communities, to working class semi-slums. City garbage dumps were located far from the city, as were clearly defined cemeteries which were often homes for criminals. A place of prayer was found just near one of the main gates, for religious festivals and public executions. Similarly, military training grounds were found near a main gate.
Muslim cities also had advanced domestic water systems with sewers, public baths, drinking fountains, piped drinking water supplies, and widespread private and public toilet and bathing facilities. The demographics of medieval Islamic society varied in some significant aspects from other agricultural societies, including a decline in birth rates as well as a change in life expectancy. Other traditional agrarian societies are estimated to have had an average life expectancy of 20 to 25 years, while ancient Rome and medieval Europe are estimated at 20 to 30 years. Conrad I. Lawrence estimates the average lifespan in the early Islamic Caliphate to be above 35 years for the general population, and several studies on the life spans of Islamic scholars concluded that members of this occupational group had a life expectancy between 69 and 75 years, though this longevity was not representative of the general population.

The early Islamic Empire also had the highest literacy rates among pre-modern societies, alongside the city of classical Athens in the 4th century BC, and later, China after the introduction of printing from the 10th century. One factor for the relatively high literacy rates in the early Islamic Empire was its parent-driven educational marketplace, as the state did not systematically subsidize educational services until the introduction of state funding under Nizam al-Mulk in the 11th century. Another factor was the diffusion of paper from China, which led to an efflorescence of books and written culture in Islamic society, thus papermaking technology transformed Islamic society (and later, the rest of Afro-Eurasia) from an oral to scribal culture, comparable to the later shifts from scribal to typographic culture, and from typographic culture to the Internet. Other factors include the widespread use of paper books in Islamic society (more so than any other previously existing society), the study and memorization of the Qur’an, flourishing commercial activity, and the emergence of the Maktab and Madrasah educational institutions.
Activities

Remember

1. Based on the purple map, describe the spread of Islam from 622-750, using geographic terminology.

Understand

2. Explain why Muslims were often better educated than European Christians during the Medieval Period.

Apply

3. Using four of your answers from Question 2, create and complete a table like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for education</th>
<th>Muslims in the Middle Ages</th>
<th>Australian equivalent in 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>example: technology</td>
<td>paper introduced from China</td>
<td>iPad and computer use in many schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for education</th>
<th>Muslims in the Middle Ages</th>
<th>Australian equivalent in 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyze

4. Create a bar graph comparing life expectancy for:
   - Muslims in the Middle Ages
   - Christians in the Middle Ages
   - Indonesians now
   - Australians now
   - Write at least two sentences explaining the data shown in your bar graph.
   - Also answer the question: Why is a bar graph better than a line graph or pie chart for showing this information?

Create

5. Create a sketch map of what a typical Muslim town/city (and surrounding area) in the Middle Ages might look like, based on the information provided in the text.