

Public Sector Consultants, Inc.

The Year
Ten
Hundred
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*The Way of Life
at the Las
Millennium*

by Craig Ruff

The Year Ten Hundred

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Craig Ruf, Public Sector Consultants, Inc.

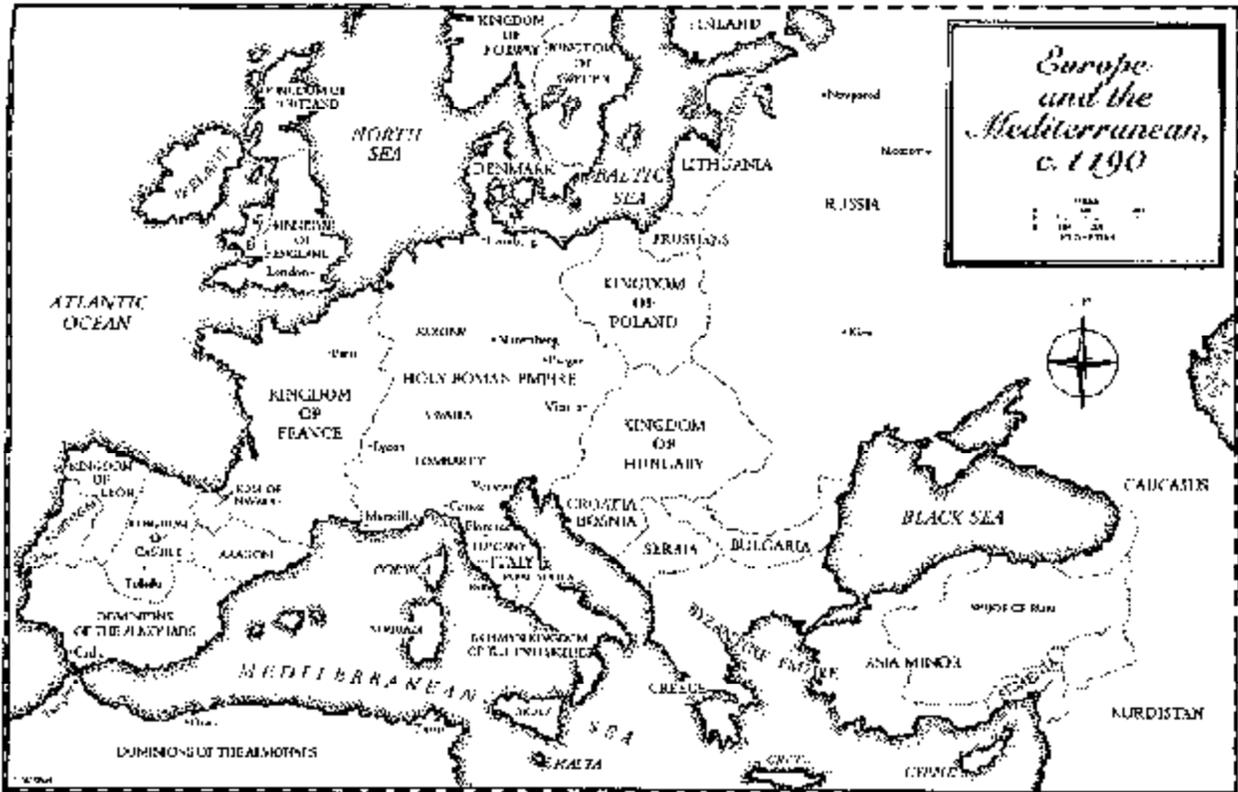
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Introduction

M*ankind sands at a crossroad. One path leads to depair and uxor hopelessness; the other, to total extinction. Let us pray that we have the wisdom to choose correctly.*

Woody Allen, commencement speech

Americans have been astoundingly slumish in planning for the millennium. Our passion seems to begin and stop at the Y2K computer problem. Inasmuch as humans are the only species that cares a whit about the calendar, the approach and passing of the year 2000 ought to inspire a bouny of reflection and celebration.

To begin with, let's consider the way we will identify time in the wake of the millennium. We call the year preceding the millennium "nineteen niney-nine." Past centennial years we know as "Ofteen hundred," "eighteen hundred," or "nineteen hundred." What then should we call the year 2000? Simply "two thousand"? I think not. The word *thousand* is never sounded out in the naming of years. For consistency's sake, we *should* refer to the millennial year as *twenty hundred*, though most people

probably will use the phrase "two thousand"; similarly, when speaking of the year 1000, we should call it *ten hundred*.

We call this decade "the nineties," and frequently we refer back to "the twenties" or "the sixties." What shall we call the next decade? A number of ideas are circulating, though no consensus has emerged. *New York Times* columnist William SaOre sumests the *aughts*, which means "the zeros." In the past, the Oirst decade of our century was called similarly the *aughties*. Another *New York Times* columnist on language, Jack Rosenthal, thinks that this term sounds creak and old-fashioned. Rosenthal favors the 'OOs, pronounced *ohs*. Soon we may be forecasting the *aught-two* or *oh-two* gubernatorial election, as you please. We could be prophesying the economy of the aughts, aughties, or ohs. The choice is yours, or *yores*.

The millennial marking of the year 2000 A.D. results from the Christian dating of time from the birth of Christ. Religion contributes the marking of time in most other major civilizations as well. As in so many other areas, the various religions do not bother with cross-cultural consistency. Counting from the year of creation,¹ or 3761 B.C., Jews number the Christian calendar's second millennium as the year 5760, a number which slips to 5761 on Rosh Hashanah. Islam's calendar begins in 622 A.D., the year of the *hegira*, or Mohammed's migration from Mecca to Medina; hence Islam dates the upcoming millennium as 1378 A.H. (*anno hegirae*). Muslims in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and several other areas of the Persian Gulf stick strictly to a lunar year, celebrating 1420 A.H. in 2000 A.D. Buddhists commemorate the year 2543. In China, each cycle of 60 lunar years is divided among twelve animals, 2000 being the year of the dragon. (In a rare **O**t of tolerance, Chinese communists in the late 1940s permitted use of both the lunar and Gregorian calendars.)

But for those using the Christian-based calendar, the end of the century and the new millennium is an appropriate point to consider how far we have advanced as a civilization. To do so,

¹ So far, the dating of the earliest known living thing on Earth takes us back at least 4 billion years. If anyone strictly adhered to the march of time, the year in which we happen to live (counted from the years since creation) would be at least ten digits long.

we might examine the state of Western civilization in the year 1000—the previous millennium—as a means of measuring this progress. This entails picturing a world in which words such as “newspaper,” “mail,” “concrete,” “fork,” “spoon,” “sewer,” “clock,” “button,” “cotton,” “windmill,” “compass,” and “dictionary” have no meaning. The task is not an easy one.

I have learned much from and been greatly entertained by several particularly excellent writings on the period, which are listed at the end of this essay. These sources are Eurocentric because much of what we know in the West about civilization in 1000 A.D. is confined to European experience. Asia, most particularly China, was thriving culturally but isolated. Little has been written in or translated into the English language about everyday life there. The same holds true for the heavily populated African continent and sparsely populated North and South American and Australian continents.

The lack of information in the West on everyday life in the many cultures outside Europe in the period is particularly vexing because the Chinese, Mayan, Aztec, Ghanaian, Byzantine, and Islamic cultures of 1000 A.D. were indisputably more advanced than the cultures of Europe (at least of Western Europe). Many of the intellectually and economically wealthy of the eleventh century were the artists, artisans, politicians, inventors, scientists, scholars,

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traders, and educators living in parts of the globe we now condescendingly describe as the “third world.” China’s industrial technology surpassed Europe’s even into the fifteenth century, and its consumer goods included things utterly foreign to most Europeans in 1000: cast iron, fans, umbrellas, rich clothing, lanterns, napkins, playing cards, money, and toilet paper.

This is not to suggest that there is an excess of information on European culture in this period. It is not easy for scholars to research and reconstruct a period of time in which virtually nothing was written down. Original writings and sources from this period are quite rare. Here and there, we have a person’s will. The epic poem *Beowulf* and Icelandic sagas are useful resources, but as Robert Lacey and Danny Danziger explain in *The Year 1000*, the translation of everything written between 500 and 1000 A.D. would not fill one carton, whereas the Starr investigation produced thirty-six cartons of material.

In comparing the research and findings of various scholars, hordes of inconsistencies arise. For example, Cordoba, Spain, was Europe’s largest city in 1000, but its population could have been anywhere from 250,000 to 750,000, depending on the source of the information. England’s population was 4.5 million in 1000, according to William

Manchester’s account of the period, *A World Lit Only by Fire*; yet the *Domesday Book*, an early property census, recorded only 275,000 heads of household in 1100, just a century later, suggesting a total population of only 1.5 million to 2 million. Qualitative descriptions, too, are plagued with ambiguity and dissonance. For example, scholars debate whether most European villages had names. As historians Will and Ariel Durant wrote, “History is mostly guessing; the rest is prejudice.”

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All things considered, in the history of the planet, a millennium is a dot on the timeline. Proportionately, 1,000 years on the continuum of geologic time would represent far less than a mile of a trip around the entire world. The earliest life on Earth dates back at least 4 billion years. The earliest discovered remains of human ancestors date back 4 million to 6 million years. The species *Homo sapiens* appears to date back as far as 250,000 years. People—as we now recognize them—go back 11,000 years. The agricultural innovation of plowing was developed just 5,000 years ago. It is sobering to think that many geologists view these past 11,000 years as the single longest stretch of human-compatible weather on most reaches of the planet. Humans have overstayed the Earth’s welcome by about the same 1,000 years that we currently commemorate.

The Year 1000

Dis is a bad place for an innocent man.

Carl Hiaasen, *Tourist Season*

The historian William Manchester points out that for about 1,000 years (400–1400 A.D.), just about nothing constructive happened in the Western world. In fact, this period did not just sidetrack culture but thrust it back at least 500 years. The best roads in Europe in 1500 A.D.—about 44,000 miles of thickly layered, well drained, durable, and straight roadway—were built by the Romans a millennium before. In the entire period, Europeans contributed just one invention—the castle—to human progress and only a couple of modifications that improved earlier inventions, for example a rigid, padded horse collar. Churches and castles aside, almost no stone buildings were constructed during those years.

Virtually everything that made European life remotely palatable in 1000 A.D. had been invented by the ancient Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Chinese, Greeks, or Romans. Such technology included making concrete and tools of stone, wood, bronze, iron, and bone; blowing glass; spinning fibers into clothes; weaving; and drying, salting, and smoking food. These civilizations also brought fermentation; the wheel and axle; plow; sickle; ax; mortar and pestle; potter's wheel; and

waterwheel. Such cultures also contributed knowledge: for example, the alphabet and writing; navigation and boats; and considerable observations in astronomy, mathematics, and engineering. Europeans contributed virtually nothing else to these inherited tools, skills, and bodies of knowledge during the course of 500 years (400–900 A.D.) and precious little in the 500 years that followed.

The shock of pondering 500 years of European inertia becomes more vivid if you picture life today absent of anything invented since 1500. Imagine no electricity, lamps, pianos, slide rules, calculators, thermometers, telescopes, telephones, adding machines, air pumps, clocks, engines, furnaces, or guns, let alone televisions, computers, cameras, and cars. Imagine where humanity would be today had European ancestors not frittered away 1,000 years, particularly given the ex-

traordinary and exponential gains in knowledge realized in just the past twenty years. Almost surely, some number of us would be living on other planets or moons.

Blame a lot of Europe's troubles during this period on the Chinese. They built the Great Wall and it worked. The *Hsiung-nu*—a nomadic and bloodthirsty group of Mongolians—could not crack it. They revved up their horses and headed west in lieu of south. They drove the equally bloodthirsty but less adept Goths deep into the territory of Rome. The Huns, as the

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Hsiung-nu were called, eventually teamed up with the Goths in one of history's early partnerships and in 410 A.D. sacked Rome, and with it, Western civilization. As these marauding forces created chaos throughout Europe, civilization retreated into darkness. By our standards, these were heady times for the ignorant, brutal, and brutish. With validiy, you could argue that the Great Wall held back the Western world's progress for a full millennium.

The largest pre-Roman culture in western Europe was the Celtic civilization. The Goths' and Huns' ransacking tour of Europe in the 5th century drove the Celts out of central Europe. Some Celts fled for safety to England and others to France and Iberia (modern Spain and Portugal). Iberian Celts later migrated to Ireland and, in smaller numbers, Scotland. These Celts developed a culture and language distinctly different than the Celts who made it to England by northern routes. Even so, it is ironic that the Irish and English are at variance

in so many ways because they share Celtic roots. By 450 A.D., non-Celtic tribes from northern Holland, France, and Germany crossed the North Sea. These Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Gauls drove the Celts and Britons of England into hard-to-reach areas of Cornwall and Wales. This is why these areas today feel the Celtic influence so much more strongly than do central and eastern England. In turn, many Cornish and Welsh residents resettled in Brittany (France) to escape the invading Germanic tribes.

Christianity and paganism² (the belief in multiple gods) were playing for high stakes in the year 1000. Following Rome's fall, the Church divided into Western (Rome) and Eastern (Constantinople) orientations. The

² A linguistic irony, the word *pagan* is rooted in the Latin *pagus*, which meant an uncultured countryside, and *pagani*, which described the rubes and country bumpkins who lived in such areas. Romans looked down their considerable noses at *pagani*. Over time, *pagan* became the word used to describe the very people who, like the Romans, believed in multiple gods.

Western church became tied into the Carolingian Empire, the most prominent and successful leader of which was Charlemagne (768–814 A.D.). The Eastern Church staked its future with the Byzantine Empire. The two churches formally split in 1054 A.D., but there had been little conversation and not much love lost between them for centuries before.

Notwithstanding the East-West division, Christianity slowly gained ascendancy in Europe between the fall of Rome and 1000 A.D.; thus James Reston, Jr. argues in *The Last Apocalypse* that the magical, millennial year truly was a turning point for Christianity.

Religion and War on the Cusp of 1000 A.D.

If men recognize no law superior to their desires, then they must fight when their desires collide.

R. H. Tawney

Reston credits events of the year 1000 as resolving—through countless military and political struggles—the question of religious dominance in Europe; specifically, the struggles determined that paganism, represented by the Vikings and Magyars of Hungary, and the Islamic faith, represented by the Moors, either were fended off by or absorbed into Christian societies. In the early tenth century, Christian communities largely dominated England, northern Italy, France, northern Spain, and Germany.

If the Church was the single most powerful organizing force of Europe in 1000 A.D., the Vikings were Europe's most powerful disorganizing force. Over the last 300 years of the first millennium, the Vikings—who hailed largely from Norway and Denmark—ruled the seas surrounding Europe. With only occasional setbacks, they conquered at will much of the British Isles, Russia, Iceland, Greenland, Normandy, Paris, the Bordeaux, Lisbon, Italy, Greece, the Balkans, and Turkey. Their invincibility stemmed from the size and speed of their boats, the quality of their arms, and their fighting ardor. Lutefisk (the native Norwegian dish of dried cod soaked in water and lye) may have had something to do with it, too.

Modern meteorologists explain the Vikings' prowess as a result of a much warmer-than-normal weather cycle in northern Europe at the time ("Little Optimum," they call it). London had a climate roughly equivalent to that of the Loire Valley in France. Virtually everywhere in Europe was two to four degrees warmer than today's climate. The arctic ice was in retreat, which explains in part the ability of Leif Ericsson (or Ericson) to traverse the North Atlantic in 1000 A.D. and discover Newfoundland. Not only did the warmth grease the way for easier navigation on the northern seas, but it also contributed mightily to the population growth and increasing density of northern Europe. Crops flourished that otherwise either would not have grown or would have produced scanty yields.

One of Europe's most regular victims of Viking raids was England, ruled between 978 and 1016 A.D. by the Anglo-Saxon Ethelred II, the Unred, (or "Unready.") Ethelred could not figure out how to block persistent raids upon the southern, eastern, and northern coasts of

England. He discharged weak armies with incompetent leadership, lost one skirmish after another, sued for surrender, and paid of the Vikings with substantial sums of silver. As a result, the Vikings cleaned up in England without working terribly hard at it.

By 1000 A.D., some Viking leaders had turned to Christianity as a way of being neighborly. Sourcing on the endless sea travel, they encouraged their people to settle in places like England and Normandy. It was easier, of course, to raise a family, marry of kids, and join in the communiy's recreational oferings if you gave up Thor and Odin and started praying to various saints. Viking genes were hardy, and the Vikings made their presence felt in the Anglo-

Saxon population. The Norman Duke William, who defeated the English at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, is just one example of these descendants of Viking settlers.

The Vikings were not the only threat to the Christian way of life. In Hungary, a tribe of nomadic horsemen called **Manars** (the 40,000 horsemen of the Apocalypse) felt yeasy enough to trash Constantinople, much of Greece, all of Italy, Burgundy, Bavaria, and northern Germany, to boot. Originally, they hailed from central Asia's steppes. Shortly before the millennium changeover (in 955 A.D.), the German Prince Otto met the **Manars en masse** and obliterated them. In Rome, the Pope was overjoyed and subsequently established the Holy Roman Empire in honor of Otto. Reston ironically points out that the said Holy Roman Empire was none of those things: It was German, not Roman, and it was a weak confederation of small principalities, hardly an empire. (That it was not holy in the tenth century goes without saying.) Shrewdly, the Pope named Otto its **Orst** emperor.

The third threat to European Christianity was the Moors of southern Spain, or *Al Andalus*, as the Moors called the region. Tracing their origins to early Islamic caliphs who governed northern Africa and southern Spain (at one point, their troops reached Tours, France), the Moors united under a strong leader, *Al Mansour* (also spelled *Almanzor*). During the tenth century, Al Mansour brought all of central and southern Spain into his empire. Slowly migrating south from northern mountain retreats, Christian armies marched on the Moors. After Al Mansour's death in 1002, Moorish unity crumbled. By 1085, Toledo (south of Madrid) had fallen into Christian hands, although it was not until 1492 that the Christian kingdoms of Portugal, Castile, and Aragon ended Moorish



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political control. Fortunately, Moorish influence on Western art, architecture, mosaics, and music continued. Certainly no culture in Europe in the tenth century could hold a candle to Al Andalus's civilization.

In the tenth century, the Christian Church was busy consolidating its power in Europe. Just after 1000, however, that consolidation became nearly complete. By 1095, Europeans were launching the first of ten crusades—which would span nearly a century—to make the Holy Land safe for Christianity.

Now that we have in mind the big picture—a continent's people furiously struggling between Christian and non-Christian forces—let's move to everyday life ten hundred years ago.

The Calendar

There is no fence nor hedge round time that is gone. You can go back and have what you like of it, if you can remember.

The narrator in the motion picture *How Green Was My Valley*

In 730 A.D., the English monk Bede ("The Venerable") took on the job of double-checking the Julian calendar. He proudly discovered that the 365-and-one-quarter-day Julian year was eleven minutes and fourteen seconds too long (meaning that about every 128 years, one day should be skipped). Eight hundred years later, someone paid attention, and the modern Gregorian calendar (named for Pope Gregory XIII) came into being. The Pope lopped off ten days in October of 1582, making up for lost or, more properly, gained time.

Bede was not content merely to second-guess Julius Caesar, who commissioned the Julian calendar. He also sought to pinpoint the year as a measurement of time since the birth of Christ. (The Julian calendar, first presented in 46 B.C., was predicated on the founding of Rome in 755 B.C.) Bede hit two major obstacles in his calculations. One resulted from the fact that Christ could not have been born in the year 0. If this were true, by the time he would have been thirty-three, his biblical age at death, Herod would have been dead for three years; therefore, Christ's year of birth must have been 4 or 3 B.C. The second problem stemmed from a vexing problem with Roman numerals. The twelve months of the year 0 never were accounted for because there was no Roman numeral for "0."³ You might want to put this truth to the test by asking a Roman acquaintance what the year before I is called.

Inasmuch as Arabic numerals were not yet in vogue in Europe (they were first introduced to Europe in Italy about 970 A.D.), the few people who could write in the year 999 A.D. wrote the year as DCCCCLXXXVIIIJ (the "J" at the end stands for Julian). Imagine the glee at the beginning of the new year, when they could simply write "M" on their checks.

In the end, Bede did what any effective politician would do: He negotiated the facts and simply announced that the current year was 730 years from the birth of Christ. Nobody in Christendom cared to argue. He wasn't called "The Venerable" for nothing. Nevertheless, it was 800 years before Bede's updated system officially was implemented.

³ The anal-retentive millennium scholars know that the new millennium and century really do not start until January 1, 2001. While all others will celebrate the changeover this New Year's Eve, these scholars will find comfort, if not much company, in their righteousness.

Knowledge

You're right. Maybe it's better not to know.

Johnson Holden to Joanna Harrington on the death of Dr. Karswell, by demon, in the motion picture *Curse of the Demon*

When early cartographers reached the end of the known world, they scribbled the following warning: "Beware, dragons lurk beyond here." The system of knowledge in 1000 was organized around dragons, demons, saints, and martyrs, figures that inspired dread and uncritical awe. The smallest things—something falling off the kitchen table—and the largest—comets and earthquakes—were attributed to the goings-on of little people, elves, trolls, fairies, and the devil. Magic was everywhere, as were shrines, relics of saints, and miracles. Saints were the equivalent of modern-day celebrities like Princess Di and Michael Jackson.

There existed little ambiguity about right and wrong. The Church was viciously anti-intellectual; it countenanced no other court of justice. Nothing differentiated *ecclesia* (the church) and *mundus* (the world). Lovers of and searchers for knowledge beyond the Church's teachings were skeptics. When these heretics were not reduced to ashes at the stake, they were exiled.

Knowledge was reserved for and preserved in monasteries, and it was far from temporal. It is a bit of a reach for Thomas Cahill to argue that the Irish saved civilization in his book *How the Irish Saved Civilization*—a title that kills all the suspense in reading the book—but not too much of an exaggeration. In part because of the relative isolation of the island, the Irish pro-

duced particularly innovative and original art and theology. In the brief periods of nonprayer, Irish monks copied the Bible and ancient writings and put on paper useful sermons and prayers for their peers. Irish émigrés to Europe reintroduced classical learning to the continent. Such was the Church's campaign against temporal knowledge that it is miraculous that the writings of Homer, Socrates, Plato, Euclid, Galen, Archimedes, Virgil, and Cicero survived. Much of the work of Sophocles and Euripides was lost. Humans came very close to losing complete touch with culture before the Dark Ages.⁴

Occasionally preserved were some temporal works—such as the great Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, Icelandic sagas, or German myths and fables—but as mentioned earlier, translations of all the European writings of this age would fit into one carton. Hence, our knowledge even of the lack of knowledge in the period is limited.

Population

You folks from out of town?

Murray the Muggler to midwesterners
George and Gwen Kellerman,
first-time visitors to New York City,
in the motion picture *Out-of-Towners*

Europe contained about 60 million people in 1000 A.D., less than one-tenth of today's European population. In contrast, China had a population of about 100 million, and Japan had more than 4 million people. Europeans were sprinkled around in small villages. From

⁴ I understand that the term "Dark Ages" fails the political correctness test in some quarters, wherein "Early Middle Ages" is preferred.

the vantage of an airplane, Europe would have looked like an archipelago of **dink** settlements, surrounded not by water but by very dense forest. In 1000, London probably accounted for 50,000 of the 1 million to 4.5 million people living in England and Wales.⁵ Paris had about 20,000 people. Cordoba, Spain, was the most populous European **ciy** in 1000, with no fewer than 250,000 and as many as 750,000 residents. Only the Spanish cities of Cordoba and Seville would have counted among the world's **Ofteen bimest** cities of 1000.

Constantinople, formerly known as Byzantium and currently known as Istanbul, contended with Cordoba for the title of the world's most populous **ciy**. As late as 1500, the largest cities in Europe (Paris, Naples, and Venice) had only about 150,000 people each.

Some people lived in towns and walled cities, but probably no more than 10–20 percent of the population. In these large towns, twisting streets could barely accommodate a man with a **for**y-inch waist. By far the greatest number of people lived in villages of less than 100 people, small settlements that were about **Ofteen** to **tweny** miles from one another and separated by dense woodlands or swampy bogs. For all but the most adventuresome and those who had been exiled, an entire lifetime was spent within the **con**ones

of the village. According to Norman F. Cantor in *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, at least 80 percent of the population never moved more than ten miles from their place of birth. This is one reason why many villages had no names: There was no need to call the only place you'd ever know anything but "here."

In *A.D. 1000: A World on the Brink of Apocalypse*, Richard Erdoes vividly describes what was in store for the folks who left the village:

According to Norman F. Cantor in *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, at least 80 percent of the population never moved more than ten miles from their place of birth. This is one reason why many villages had no names: There was no need to call the only place you'd ever know anything but "here."

Traveling in the tenth century was perilous. Those who could avoid it did. Roads, where they existed, were atrocious, and there were no inns. The greater part of Europe was still covered with wild, undrained bogs and primeval forests in which the wanderer encountered packs of roaming, ravenous wolves and ferocious grunting boars able to disembowel a victim with one swipe of their curving tusks.⁶

Animals and humans alike were wild. Within a mile or two of your village, you might **On**d cutthroats who killed, robbed, sold into slavery, or raped passersby. Had there been no **am**ressive animals of the two- or four-**lem**ed **variey**, journeys still would have been horri**Oc**. Travelling from Flanders (modern-day Belgium) to Rome would have taken two months.

Ten centuries before the movie *The Blair Witch Project*, the woods were already a source of terror. Such bedtime stories as "Little Red

⁵ Manchester guesses the population at 4.5 million, a much higher number than the speculations of Gies and Gies (1.5 million), Erdoes (more than 1 million), and Cantor (1 million).

⁶ P. 33.

Riding Hood” need to be read with the context of the Dark Ages—and the very real terrors of the period—in mind. Ms. Hood lived with her mother on the edge of a large wood. One day, her mother asked her to take a basket of goodies to her grandmother’s house. James Finn Garner parodies strident, intellectual liberalism in his version of the story, narrated in this passage from *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*:

So Red Riding Hood set off with her basket through the woods. Many people believe that the forest was a foreboding and dangerous place and never set foot in it. Red Riding Hood, however, was confident enough in her own budding sexuality that such obvious Freudian imagery did not intimidate her.

On the way to Grandma’s house, Red Riding Hood was accosted by a wolf, who asked her what was in her basket. She replied: “Some healthful snacks for my grandmother, who is certainly capable of taking care of herself as a mature adult.”

The wolf said, “You know, my dear, it isn’t safe for a little girl to walk through these woods alone.”

Red Riding Hood said, “I found your sexist remark offensive in the extreme, but I will ignore it because of your traditional status as an outcast from society, the stress of which has caused you to develop your own, entirely valid, worldview. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I must be on my way.”⁷

The drama unfolds with the wolf beating Ms. Hood to Grandma’s, eating the grandmother, dressing up in her nightclothes, and hosting the girl, who is baffled over how big her grandmother’s eyes, nose, and teeth have grown. The wolf eventually coughs up Grandma, and ends up chopped into pieces by the old lady.

To a modern audience, the story makes little sense and may be read as a quaint tale appropriate for children or an opportunity to lampoon political correctness; however, for the audience of the First millennium, the tale was probably as scary as anything Stephen King has ever written, because these threats (forests, wolves, etc . . .) were very real.

Population varied according to the times. In any given century, there might be a half-dozen years of absolute famine. One of every three or so years brought a degree of famine. In these periods, an entire village might disappear, its residents killed off by starvation. Gut-wrenching stories of deprivation have been handed down: Scores of villagers in England jumped hand-in-hand over cliffs to suicide rather than face the inevitable suffering that comes with starvation; fathers legally sold into servitude children under the age of seven; infanticide was not a crime.

On the positive side of things, plagues paled in comparison to the force they became in the late Middle Ages because there was so little pestilence-by-tourism (people stayed in one place) and pestilence-by-trade (rats and disease were not transported from one village to another through mercantilism). Cities occasionally were hard hit by epidemics, but none saw anything like the 50 percent death rate of the Black Death plague in the fourteenth century.

⁷ P. 2.

The Order of Pecking

*Irish poets, learn your trade,
Sing whatever is well made,
Scorn the sort now growing up
All out of shape from toe to top,
`eir unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds.
Sing the peasantry, and then
Hard-riding country gentlemen
`e holiness of monks, and a ter
Porter-drinkers' randy laughter.*

W. B. Yeats, "Under Ben Bulbin"



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In 1000, the rigid trappings of the caste system of the High Middle Ages were ledging, though the Church was rigidly hierarchical. Among the laiy, certain ambiguities and varying degrees of worthiness muddled the waters.

The kings of 1000 ruled relatively small swaths of land. France's "king" at the time, for example, is better described as the Duke of Paris, since he would leave the city infrequently and could never fully depend on loyalty or security outside the city limits. William, who conquered England in 1066, was not a French king but rather the Duke of Normandy.

Each kingdom had unclear boundaries. Within any one kingdom, inhabitants of the many villages, towns, and cities battled each other, and numerous dialects further divided citizens. A king in 1000 resembled an owner of numerous plantations in the antebellum South.⁸ Nonetheless, the monarch was expected to live an active life as sportsman, warrior, levier of taxes, and source of social order. He was surrounded by a throng of sycophants, retainers, fighters, and slaves, who all did their best to make him feel powerful.

Below the king ranked other nobility—namely, princes, dukes, counts, and lords—though many of these nobles held greater sway and wealth than kings in other lands. Wealth hinged on farmable acreage, number of slaves, and size of police protection.

Although lacking a title, a landowner of significant property and multiple farms came next on

⁸ Strictly for trivia contests, the showcasing kings of 1000 were as follows: England's Ethelred II (The Unred), France's Robert II (The Wise), the Holy Roman Empire and Saxony's Otto III, Hungary's Stephen I, Poland's Boleslav I, Norway's Olaf I, and Russia's Vladimir. The Sung Dynasty ruled China. The Pope was Sylvester II.

the Medieval Age's list of *who's who*. On large estates, people were rank ordered (1) steward, or day-to-day administrator, (2) miller, (3) smith, (4) forester, and (5) herdsman.

The vast majority of people were peasants and serfs. Peasants cobbled together a living by farming small patches of land behind their village home. Serfs did likewise, but rented land from the elite, paying taxes and sharing crops with the master. Unlike peasants, serfs were not free. In England, they were called *villeins*. While serfs could plow and harvest crops from a small piece of land that they called their own, they also were required to work the master's lands. Serfs toiled nearly as hard for nobility as slaves did, but legally they had a different distinction.

At the bottom of the list were slaves, who were treated much as the enslaved were from Old Testament times through the American Civil War. Deemed and valued as property, they were traded at will.

10

Human Nature

Always remember, politics are about things as they are.

Tom Pendergast's advice to young Harry Truman

The leaders of the Greek, Chinese, and Roman empires valued organized knowledge and demonstrated an interest in the history of man and the planet. They planned for the future by

building roads and inventing laborsaving devices; however, attention to the past and future seems largely absent from human consciousness in Europe's Dark Ages. Christianity comforted people with the promise that something good came after the suffering of life, but to villagers, the words "yesterday" and "tomorrow" had little meaning or consequence. Life was strictly about the needs of the present day: finding enough to eat, warding off invasion, and simply surviving. Ergo, individuals conceived of the relevance of their own lives and the lives of others much differently than we do today. Notions of self-awareness, identity, and sympathy were much more limited then than now. Psychotherapists would have had a tough time building a market in the year 1000.

In this less complex time, people used simple names, such as "Eric" or "Maude," and their kids were known as "Eric's son" or "Maude's daughter." Just as commonly, villagers were named after their features, for example, "the Fair," "the Red," "One-Eye," or "Limp." Royalty frequently linked the first name to a feature; thus the Carolingians had Louis the Pious, Louis the Stammerer, Charles the Simple, Charles the Bald, Charles the Fat, and Louis the Slumard; the Saxons had Henry the Fowler; and the Anglo-Saxons had Edwy the Fair, Edgar the Peaceful, Edmund the Ironside, and Harold the Harefoot. Last names were rare and quite unnecessary. Surnames, at least in England, did not come into vogue until the mid-twelfth century.

Buildings, Homes, and Possessions

What a dump!

Bette Davis's character in the motion picture *Beyond the Forests*

Sod, wood, and thatch sheltered people. If a good storm came along, you'd have to rebuild. Sometimes, a budding architect would attempt to add a second story, usually with grim results. By the thirteenth century, second stories had become somewhat more commonplace; it was in the second story that the family's animals were sheltered, hence the expression "raining cats and dogs" is quite literal. The right torrent of rain and wind indeed would cause the pets to fall out of and off their aeries.

Storms were part of everyday life and attributable to and predictive of astounding things. Lacey and Danziger cite a ninth-century manuscript, dedicated to thunder, which contains the following passage:

In May, thunder presages a hungry year . . . In the month of July, thunder signifies crops turning out well, and livestock perishing . . . If it thunders on Sunday, this is considered to presage an extensive mortality of monks and nuns . . . Of thunder on Wednesday, there is no doubt that it presages the death of idle and scandalous prostitutes.⁹

The village home was one room with a dirt floor and no windows. The medieval peasant's home measured about ten-by-twenty feet. The

roof was thatched with straw, broom, or heather. It rotted easily and often caught fire. Stone was used only to erect castles and grand cathedrals, even though older Greek and Roman cultures widely used stone for a variety of buildings. The home contained a hearth of hot coals for cooking and heating and straw to provide comfort for sleeping. Chairs were rare, but the family might have a bench. Chests held the family's few possessions, like bowls and jugs. In the morning, odds were excellent that you would awaken next to one or more of the family sheep, goats, dogs, chickens, or cats. The notion of *familia* encompassed not just immediate and extended relatives but also slaves, animals, and servants.

Aside from the hearth's fire, there might be a beeswax or tallow (mutton fat) candle for light within the home. The tallow candle must have added to the ripe aroma of the medieval household. Lighting had limited benefits, anyway. Nobody could read, and even if they could, there was nothing to read. Candlelight was used primarily in the mornings and early evenings during the winter months, when fourteen hours of the day were sunless.

Privacy is a luxury of the modern age. Lovemaking, bathing, and toileting did not leave the stage of public viewing until the seventeenth century or even later. The toilet of the home of 1000 was just outside the back door. There, on the ground, would pile up human and animal excrement, urine, and last night's leftover bones. (In case you wonder, moss was the preferred toilet paper of the day.) This was the golden age of filth. Some scholars have hypothesized that the human sense of smell must have changed over time. Certainly today we could not tolerate the odor of the early medieval village.

⁹ P. 140.

Peasants died with no more possessions than their simple home and their clothes. Even noblemen left little inheritance. Erdoes cites the will of a Catalan baron whose property at death consisted of “all his furniture, to wit: one featherbed, three coverlets, two rugs—one of felt and one not of felt. Likewise all his money, namely forty silver pennies.”¹⁰

The small castle a nobleman called home consisted of a few small rooms. Damp and smoky, it offered only small advantages over the peasant’s shack. As the baron’s will makes clear, interior decoration was minimalist in the extreme.

Health

‘The art of medicine consists of amusing the patient while nature cures the disease.

Voltaire

The practice of bleeding and the applying of leeches is not just an over-the-top conjecture of contemporary historians and physicians. People bled and leeches to the hilt. Bleeding was quite simply viewed as the purging of bad things—like demons—that had gotten into the bloodstream. It may seem like folly today, but bleeding retained its popularity (though certainly not its effectiveness) well into the nineteenth century. Of course, the results were iatrogenic to the max. (In deference to the squeamish, we will not discuss the medieval practice of *trepanning*, or drilling holes into the brains of the sick.)

¹⁰ P. 41.

Leeches became synonymous with medical remedy. During the 900s, *Bald’s Leechbook*, a guide to the cures and remedies of the age, became a relative bestseller. Lacey and Danziger’s description of it follows.

Its remedies were conveniently listed in descending order from the head to the toe. One cure for a headache involved binding the stalk of the herb crosswort to the head with a red bandana, while chilblains were to be treated with a mixture of ems, wine, and fennel root. Right in the middle of the remedies, along with other ministrations to the groin area, was listed the Viagra of the year 1000—the yellow-lowered herb agrimony. Boiled in milk, agrimony was guaranteed to excite the man who was “insufficiently virile”—and if boiled in Welsh ale, it was described as having exactly the contrary effect.¹¹

For a spider bite, you would fry, crush, and eat black snails. Smoke from smoldering goat’s hair helped relieve lower back pain. If you burned bees, you could make an ointment of their ashes and retard baldness. When bleeding, leeching, and herbal remedies did not work, you could try cauterization. Sans TLC and little white hats, your nursing staff would apply red-hot iron poker to your body—acupuncture with an attitude.

Nobody knew what a germ was, but everyone knew what an insect was. Because individuals customarily owned one set of clothes, the skin came alive with little gnats, ticks, and lice. Actually, most people in Europe went naked whenever the weather allowed, because nudity was far better than dealing with insects. In years of famine, it might have been necessary to exchange that one set of clothes, anyway, for something to eat.

¹¹ P. 126.

Bathing was almost unheard of in Christian Europe. Only in monasteries would soaping and cleaning the body be undertaken, though extremely infrequently. One English monastery's log required that monks take **One** baths every year, which Lacey and Danziger point out as being fanaticism by Anglo-Saxon standards.

The Moors, in contrast, associated cleanliness with godliness and bathed regularly. A Muslim ambassador to the Slavs recorded the following description of awakening in one Russian home:

Every day they wash themselves a little—hair, face and hands only—with the **Olthiest**, dirtiest water they can **One**d. Each morning one of these girls come to such a fellow with a big bowl of water and sets it before him. He washes his face, combs his hair into the bowl, spits out his phlegm, and blows snot from his nostrils into it. As soon as he is done, the girl carries the same bowl with the same water to the one next in line, and so she goes along from one to the other.¹²

The average height and weight of people at the time is **di2**cult to assess. Manchester believes that the average man stood **One** feet and weighed 135 pounds. Lacey and Danziger **One**d evidence that men in England were a bit shorter than they are today (**One** feet, eight inches compared to **One** feet, nine inches today) but that women were about an inch taller (**One** feet, four-and-one-quarter inches compared to **One** feet,

three-and-one-half inches today). Women of the period were not excluded from the world of tilling, hoeing, and other kinds of manual labor. Lacey and Danziger conclude that people started shrinking in size as the population **densiy** grew in Europe. This trend toward smallness was not reversed until the late nineteenth century.

Health was relative, as was life expectancy. Half the people died before the age of **thiry**. If you made it to **for**y, you were extended an AARP card. At **Ofy** or older, you were revered. Life expectancy for females was shorter (only **tweny**-four years) than for males because so many died giving birth. Girls were married **of** between the ages of twelve and **Ofteen**; by nineteen, unmarried women were spinsters. Boys came of **majoriy** between the ages of twelve and fourteen. One-fourth of all children died before their **Orst** birthday.

The village celebrated marriages, sending **of** the bride and groom to a fairly private place in the nearby woods. For the only time in their lives, they got a vacation—a full lunar month of R&R. Villagers provided them with a couple of quarts of mead, made of honey, along with the gruel *du jour*. The traditional month after marriage was thus nicknamed the “honeymoon.” It is hardly surprising that a good number of brides came home pregnant.

**When ble ding
le ching, and herbal
remedies did not work,
you could trycautery.
Sans TLC and lixle
whi e hats, your nursing
staf would applyred-
hot iron pokers to your
body—acupuncture with
an axi ude.**



¹² Erdoes, Pps. 188–9.

Food and Beverage

... is place certainly reeks of hospitality and good cheer . . . or maybe it's this cheese.

Jean Harlow's character, sarcastically referring to Clark Gable's character's manners in the motion picture *Red Dust*

In good times (the unfamines) you ate two square meals a day. The morning meal was served shortly after rising, or between 8:00 and 10:00 A.M., and supper was served anywhere from 3:00 to 5:00 P.M. Meals were healthy compared to today's fast food. They included lots of cereals and quite a few vegetables, with starch in the form of bread. Protein was harder to come by.

Grain sustained life. Cooked whole, the gruel or cereal fed the peasant's family. Ground by water mill, it became oat, barley, wheat, or rye flour for bread. Much progress in the area of processing grain would be made in the years immediately after 1000: In the year 1000 there were only 100 mills in all of England; however, the *Domesday Book* logs 5,624 mills by the year 1086, and that figure is likely a gross undercount.

In villages, peasants ate a steady diet—twice-a-day, everyday—of gruel made from wheat, barley, rye, or oats. The porridge simmered in a pot on a trivet over the hearth's coals. If you lived in a larger town, city, monastery, or castle, you might dine on several soup courses—one of cabbage, another of watercress, one of **em**, and maybe another of carrots, peas, or beans. If you were really lucky, you got cheese soup. If you were really, really lucky, you got chicken soup, which was known even in the year 1000 as having soothing and restorative pow-

ers. The shortage of chickens made this meal a rare event. With dinner, you might eat a pound or more of bread. In a typical day, a European of the **clern** or nobility ate more than three pounds of breads made of wheat or rye. Along with apples, pears, and nuts, the peasants' diet of gruel heralded modern-day nutritional advice to stick with a low-fat, high-**O**ber diet.

In 1000 Europe had no potatoes, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, or brussels sprouts. These foods were not imported until much later. Worse for vegetarians and carnivores alike, there was no such thing as coffee or tea, sugar, or chocolate. Honey was the only sweetener. Among the available spices, people preferred cloves, mustard, caraway, and pepper.

Meat was special. England and many other areas of the continent were crowded with wild boars, and pigs were domesticated, although not plentiful. You might occasionally get served a huge pork sausage (we're talking the size of a New York City phone book). Other meat, provided by goats and sheep, was far rarer, and primarily available in England. Cows and horses could be eaten, but cows were valued for milk and horses for plowing **O**elds. The hunter who stumbled on a deer was one lucky fellow, as venison was worth its weight in gold. Swans were in reasonable supply, as were cranes, crows, and herons. If you lived close to an inland river or lake or the sea, **O**sh—particularly eel, trout, and herring—were plentiful and popular. In late fall, pork and herring were salted and beef was dried and salted for the long winters.

The dry martini was nine centuries from being created, but wine and beer were abundant. On the continent, where grapevines proliferated, wine was made and consumed in huge quantities. Little was stored or left to age. In England, where grapes were harder to grow, mead was a respect-

able substitute. Both there and in Germany, ale was popular. During the much later reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII (the sixteenth century), the king set a per capita allowance of a gallon of beer per day. Fortunately for moms and dads, per capita included kids. This gives some sense of just how much alcohol was consumed in earlier times. And there was no aspirin.

Fasting was not so popular as eating but about as common. Some years, as noted previously, were worse than others were, and famines led to mass starvation. Cannibalism was not unheard of. Families who could not afford another mouth to feed might defy the church and abandon their newborns to nearby woods. Some months, even in good years, were worse than others were. July, for example, was a relatively barren month. It was late for the spring goodies like dandelions, peas, and carrots, and it was early for root vegetables. Another terrible time of the year was late winter/early spring, the period after things stored over the winter had been consumed but before spring shoots had materialized. The custom of fasting during the forty days of Lent was driven not only by Church dogma but also by necessity.

Royalty ate better than the peasants (surprise, surprise!) A monarch, duke, or count would entertain special friends at a long table. People would eat from common platters filled with roasted pigs, apples, and beans. A cup of wine or ale was passed from person to person and was always replenished by the help. Jesters and musicians might entertain during and after the meal, which frequently would last hours.

In at least one monastery, the diary shows that monks ate fish two to four times weekly, along with ample quantities of cheese and eggs. Under Benedictine policy, monks could eat no meat; however, the monks cleverly managed to

see that poultry was not defined as meat. About one pint of wine daily rounded out the monk's nutritional intake.

Style and Sex

All I know is my heart was really pounding, and I felt, I felt a funny tingling all over y'know. I don't know, I was either in love or I had smallpox.

Woody Allen's character in the motion picture *Take the Money and Run*

In England, all human beings were called *menn*. One human being was called a *mann*. If you wanted to distinguish the genders, males were called *waepnedmenn* (weaponed-menn) and females were called *wifmenn* (weaving-menn), a word which obviously is the source of the modern word "wife." Technically, words such as "chairman" or "mankind" or "man" (representing the human race) are very consistent with Anglo-Saxon usage and show no partiality toward either gender. I would not bother arguing the issue today, however.

Peasants, as mentioned previously, had one set of clothes, full of vermin. In the village in warm weather, many fashion plates went nude. Men of the nobility wore knee-length tunics and cloaks, open on one side and fastened on the left shoulder with clasps. They also wore undershirts and hose. Women always had their heads covered, in obedience to religious dogma.

Male servants and serfs wore their hair short, while landowners and the nobility wore it long. Women prided themselves in very long braids.

The Church frowned on sex, admonishing the clergy to avoid it and urging the laity not to enjoy it, even within marriage. Most everyone, of course, engaged in and presumably enjoyed it, including the clerics. The Catholic Church had not yet extended formally to clergy the fringe benefit of celibacy. Many monks, bishops, and popes married freely. The wills of bishops and priests before the last millennium regularly dispersed property to their wife and kids.

Economic Development

*Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed can never be supplied.
A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintain'd its man;
For him light labour pread her wholesome sore,
Jus gave what life requir'd, but gave no more;
His best companions, innocence and health;
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.*

Oliver Goldsmith,
"The Deserted Village"

As Cantor differentiates the classes of 1000, individuals worked, ruled (which meant fought), or prayed, according to their station in life. As a peasant, you grew your own food in a small plot behind your house, between the village and the big, bad woods beyond. You made your clothes from the wool of sheep. You built your home out of scraps from the woods. Or, you were a king, prince, emperor, or a factotum in their ranks and lived off the mini-

mal taxes and retainers you could collect. If you were a monk, you lived a peasant-like lifestyle in a monastery.

Commerce between societies was quite limited and nothing like the east-west, north-south trading and transportation dynamic of Roman times. Silk from the Middle and Far East seeped into Europe's royal circles and courts. The Islamic caliphates exported silver and horses; India exported spices and gold. Vikings traded for these goods furs, honey, and weapons. International trade was just beginning to expand again, most impressively in Flanders. Flemish merchants huddled for protection in *burghs*, or fortresses owned by local royalty. As the bourgeoisie grew in number, they built walls around themselves and began to resemble the denizens of today's gated, suburban communities.

By far the biggest, broadest, and most lucrative trade was in slaves.¹³ For most Americans, slavery always will be associated with the forced importation of Africans, but slavery was common in ancient civilizations as well as in the first millennium. Slavery in those times, however, was colorblind.

The Romans had set the bar very high on slave-based entrepreneurship, but the early medievalists were not exactly pikers. When you conquered a village, you made off with any resident sized up as slave material. Slaves possessed utterly no rights and could not own property or marry without permission. Slaves could be granted their freedom, in which case they might lead a more normal life. Ireland's St. Patrick, for example, was abducted from his English home while he was a young lad and sold into slavery, but ultimately he was freed.

¹³ "Slave" comes from the word *Slav*, the Slavic people being a particularly bountiful source of slaves in this era.

Actually, by the year 1000, slavery in Europe was starting to lose its edge and appeal. The Church urged its faithful not to enslave a person other than a Jew, Moor, or pagan. As agricultural yields increased due to the introduction of heavier plows and more efficient use of horse collars, enslavement of people was slowly losing its economic incentive.

England and Moorish Spain had currency in 1000, but aside from a few noble families, currency simply did not circulate much in the rest of Europe. The economy consisted of bartering and the exchange of goods within a single village. Intracontinental trading might involve transporting English woollens to France.

England's silver coins gave rise to an intriguing way of taxing people. Every two or three years, all the coins of the realm were declared void. People raced down to their nearest mint, about seveny of which were sprinkled around the country, and exchanged the old coins for new ones. For every ten coins brought in, the redeemer got eight or nine back. Some of the difference compensated the minter for all his bother and some was sent to London as tax. In unstable budgetary times, one presumes that the king shortened the shelf life of the coinage. If he was running up a big surplus, he might pleasantly surprise his constituents by stretching their use. By the way, if in your coin collection you find an English coin dated 997 or 1001 A.D., recall that Arabic numerals were not yet in use in this period.

Other ingenious forms of taxation included *pontage* (charging anyone for the privilege of using a bridge), *rivage* (a toll for wading across a stream), and *péage* (a foot tax for walking across somebody's land).

So primitive were transactions that the simple "plus" (+) and "minus" (–) signs did not appear in European culture until much later. Roman numbering left a lot to be desired. Try multiplying the Roman numbers MCDVII and DIX. Only much later did the abacus come along and make checkout lines possible.

Crime and Punishment

I don't feel that I have to wue everybody out, Tom. Jus my enemies. ` at's all.

Michael Corleone in the motion picture *` e Godfather Part II*

Crimes of the eleventh century are fairly indistinguishable from crimes of our time. Robbery, murder, and rape, for example, ofended communiy standards and Church teachings. But how perpetrators were handled, judged, and penalized was radically diferent than today.

The elite—which included noblemen, landowners, knights, and clern—regularly escaped conviction for crimes. They were held to a lower standard than peasants, serfs, and slaves. Even when judged guilty, the elite received diferent penalties than did the ri7af. Murder was far from a clear-cut matter. Perhaps a duke stabbed to death one of his slaves. As rationale, he might have argued that the slave failed to meet job expectations. The beneOt of doubt would go to the duke, hence no conviction. The opposite would be true had the slave slain the duke.

A lord might take the life of a peasant and be judged guilty without reason. The lord's penalty might have been payment of a **One**—a grief fund—to the peasant's family, whereas a peasant murderer might get hanged. If a nobleman was convicted of an unreasonable and particularly egregious offense, he might get the death penalty, but it would be carried out in the humane manner of beheading by axe, as opposed to the mode of executing peasants: burning offenders at the stake or subjecting them to garroting or drawing and hanging, followed by disembowelment then dismemberment.

In this era, there were no jails, lockups, or prisons, aside from the dungeons in royal castles. Short of these draconian punishments, wrongdoers limped along missing a tongue or a hand or foot or two.

A good number of crimes were adjudicated through vendetta. Families simply took care of meting out justice to those who harmed them. In *Living in the Tenth Century*, Heinrich Fichtenau recounts such an example from the seventh century, wherein Bishop Landibert of Liège was upset that two brothers had harmed his servants. The bishop's dependents and kin killed the brothers. The next of kin of the brothers subsequently had to kill the bishop. Vengeance upheld honor, the criminal justice system got a pass, and justice was efficiently dispensed.

Language

I am always sorry when any language is lost, because languages are the pedigree of nations.

Samuel Johnson,
Life of Boswell: Tour to the Hebrides

A shocking aspect of early medieval language, at least in England, is the absence of profanity. Incidents of road rage must have been considerably more genteel. The English have the Dutch to credit for introducing them to swearwords in the late Middle Ages. It is conceivable that obscenities were used in everyday language, but in the only documents we have at hand, mostly written by monks, no such words are to be found.

Variations of Latin were spoken in mainland

Europe. This original language gave rise to the Romance languages of Spanish, French, and Italian, the variances of which keep American visitors on their toes. Because of the limited opportunities for travel, many isolated villagers formed dialects indecipherable in villages as close as twenty miles away. Eventually, England's multiple personalities of Gaelic, Celt, Breton, Greek, Roman, Anglo, Saxon, Jute, and Norse (or Viking) melded and produced the rich tongue of *Englisc* (Angle-ish). The many original tongues produced a slew of

Because of the limited opportunities for travel, many isolated villagers formed dialects indecipherable in villages as close as twenty miles away.



synonyms for words within the English language. Historically, if you wanted to bring up a child, you *reared* him in English or *raised* her in Norse; both words eventually were incorporated into English. Because of the many different grammars and word endings denoting tense and gender, English-speakers simplified words by removing the clumsy endings that endure in German, Slavic, and Romance languages. It is no accident that English is the language of choice across the world: The relative simplicity of the grammar and the broad array of nuanced choices to convey explicit meanings make it a logical choice (that and the fact that Americans and Brits intransigently resist learning any other language).

Battling and Warring

Rules? In a knife fight?

The Sundance Kid to Butch Cassidy,
just before being kicked in the groin,
in the motion picture
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid

The absence of decent roads did not stand in the way of barbaric and incessant warfare. The age's barbarism might make you cringe, but lest you feel holier-than-thou, consider the fact that in our modern times the combined effect of two world wars and the despots Hitler and Stalin caused more deaths than the entire population of Europe in 1000.

Battles were largely seasonal. You would not drag in from the fields of summer young men tilling, weeding, and watching over the crops that meant survival in the upcoming winter. Even in the warmer-than-now climate, winter

was miserable, and to wage war in this season required expensive clothing. Spring was reserved for planting, which left late fall as the best time to pick a fight. You not only had able-bodied men with fewer constructive things to do, but you could count on raiding silos full of harvested grain from the enemy.

"Wars were self-perpetuating,"¹⁴ David Fromkin writes in *The Way of the World*. Feudal leaders attracted to their service the best-skilled warriors. In a tight labor market, the leaders had to give them property and goods. To continue recruitment, these leaders had to constantly acquire new land and booty to pay the warriors, requiring of course more warriors for such conquests. As mentioned earlier, leaders did not preside over nations so much as clusters of villages and towns. There were probably a couple of hundred kings in northern Europe alone. The fact that these monarchs could not keep their hands off one another, lead to a state of near-constant warring as well as an entire class of nobility entirely occupied with supporting or plotting against the monarch *du jour* and warring, enslaving, and collecting taxes on his behalf. These peevish cabals were a far cry from the more successful military-industrial empires of China, Rome, Greece, and the Mayan world.

In such a world, the bevy of brawn prevailed; the strong of brain were superfluous. Erdoes believes that people were roughly viewed as the equivalent of livestock. If you killed off the peasants and serfs in an enemy's territory, you hit him in the pocketbook. The strong robbed, killed, and despoiled the weak. Men and women were murdered, mutilated, castrated, and had limbs hacked off. General rules of war were confined to refraining from (1) fighting on holy days and the Sabbath, (2) violating nuns

¹⁴ P. 105.

and wounding unarmed clerics, (3) pestering folks who sought sanctuary in a church, (4) burning cloisters, (5) destroying crops, and (6) cutting down olive trees. In some areas, it was also considered uncouth to rape and pillage villagers after dark, steal all the wax and honey from a person's beehives, or not leave a peasant one horse for plowing.¹⁵

Vikings and **M**ansars, being utterly ruthless, subscribed to no rules. The blood curdled at the prospect of an incursion by either group. Their forms of torment were boundless. A particularly noxious Viking means of playing hardball was the "blood-eagle." The victim's ribs were chopped of along the spine and spread apart like wings so that the quivering lungs could be torn away and pulled out through the open back. Prodding poisonous adders down the victim's throat or through a hole carved into the stomach also made good sport.

20

The costumes of war ranged from the Vikings' wardrobe of chest armor and impregnable helmets to the Irish Celts' custom of running

into battle stark naked. The latter certainly took advantage of the element of surprise, but the former seems more pragmatic. In a compromise between the two wardrobes, the bravest of all Vikings were called *Berserks*, or "men who fought without shirts" (*serks*).

Games and Recreation

As I undersand it, port is hard work for which you do not get paid.

Irvin S. Cobb

As summer television ratings have proved, humans find great appeal in wrestling. Of all village games and sports in 1000, nothing came close to the popularity of the wrestling matches among grunting, half-starved men. As to whether or not bouts were rehearsed and maneuvers carefully plotted is anyone's guess. Chess was played here and there, and a variation on tic-tac-toe provided fun for the whole family.

¹⁵ P. 39.

Milking the Millennium

T*his is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.*

Winston Churchill, November 10, 1942

The millennium provides an opportunity not only to celebrate the present but also to examine the past and look forward to the future. In this spirit, this essay celebrates the coming millennium by reflecting on life 1,000 years ago, not simply to provide a lesson in history, but as a means to understand and enrich the times we live in now and to prepare for a brighter future.

In looking back through history, we can celebrate by

- 1 gaining perspective on how much we have or—in certain areas—have not progressed;
- 1 appreciating the blessings that we ordinarily take for granted, namely freedom, innovation, invention, and exploration; and
- 1 applauding the giants of philosophy, medicine, physics, mathematics, law, and the arts—people whose legacies have greatly enriched our lives.

In celebrating the present, we might take stock of the condition of humanity and the Earth, taking into account

- 1 the fragility of humanity's relationship to the Earth;
- 1 the tenuous relationships between the different peoples in the family of mankind;
- 1 the very small and humble role humans play in the history of the Earth;
- 1 the priorities of humanity (Are we paying attention to the big picture or diverting our attention to matters of insignificance? For what accomplishments would we want the people of 3000 to salute us? In what shameful ways might they remember us?); and
- 1 the innovators and humanitarians who are making contributions, big and small, to our times.

The effect of brain science research or the home-delivered meal is much greater than we fully appreciate. Outstanding stewardship should be recognized and rewarded immediately, not 10 years later, and certainly not 100 or 1,000 years later.

Yet another means of celebrating is to prophesize the condition of the Earth in the year 2100 (the subsequent turn of the century) or at the next millennium (the year 3000). In doing so, we can

- 1 recognize that our full potential is unrealized;
- 1 imagine where we would be had we not lost 1,000 years of progress and dedicate ourselves to never again doing so; and
- 1 envision how those who are suffering (the poor, sick, troubled, and undereducated) might be alleviated.

We also might get into the habit of asking ourselves not simply whether an innovation *can* create certain ends but the far more important question of whether we want those ends. For example, do we wish for endless life through science? Do we want humanity to become machine-like and machines to become human-like?

The past, present, and future all are worth celebrating. We can best milk the millennium, or put it to progressive use, if people unite in appraising and celebrating all three histories.

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