

The Middle Ages



SLT 2016

Lecture 6

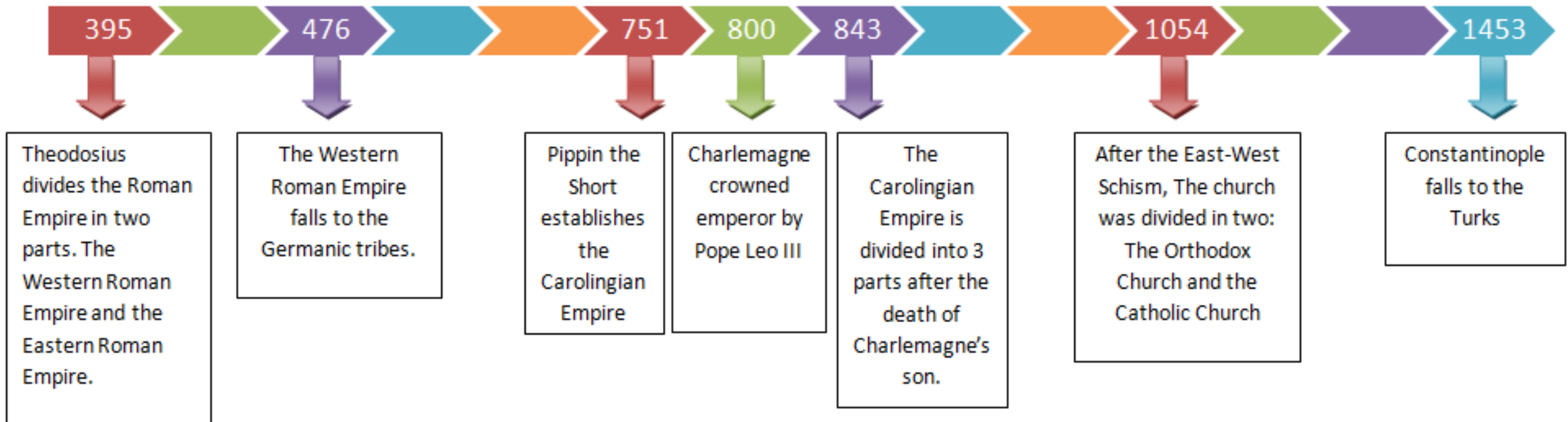
The Middle Ages

is a period of European history between the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century and the Renaissance in the 15th.

Distinctive features:

- unity of Western Europe within the Roman Catholic Church,
- feudal organization of political, social and economic relations, and
- art used for largely religious purposes.

Middle Ages: timeline



The **Carolingian Empire** (800–924) was the final stage in the history of the early medieval realm of the Franks, ruled by the Carolingian dynasty.

The Middle Ages: 3 sub-periods

- **The early Middle Ages (V-XI AD)**

- pagan Germanic tribes converted to Christianity;
- the church preserved Latin culture
- the rise of feudal kingdoms

- **The high Middle Ages (XII-XIII AD)**

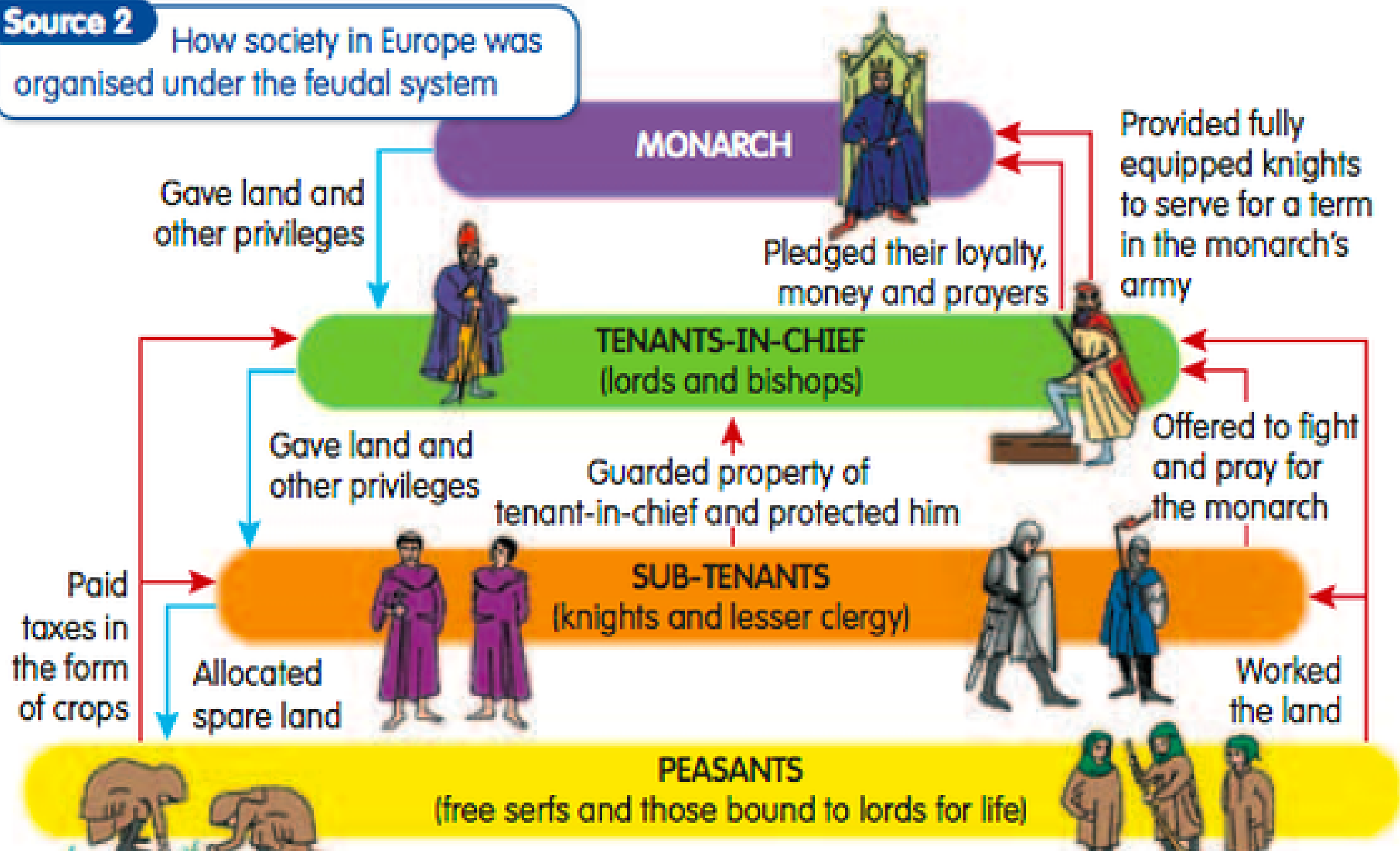
- consolidation of feudal states,
- the expansion of European influence during the Crusades,
- scholasticism and monasteries, and
- the growth of population and trade

- **The later Middle Ages (XIV-XV AD)**

- Black Death & incessant wars,
- The rise of nation-states and new modes of social and economic organization
- the first voyages of discovery

Source 2

How society in Europe was organised under the feudal system



Cooperation and Mutual Obligations



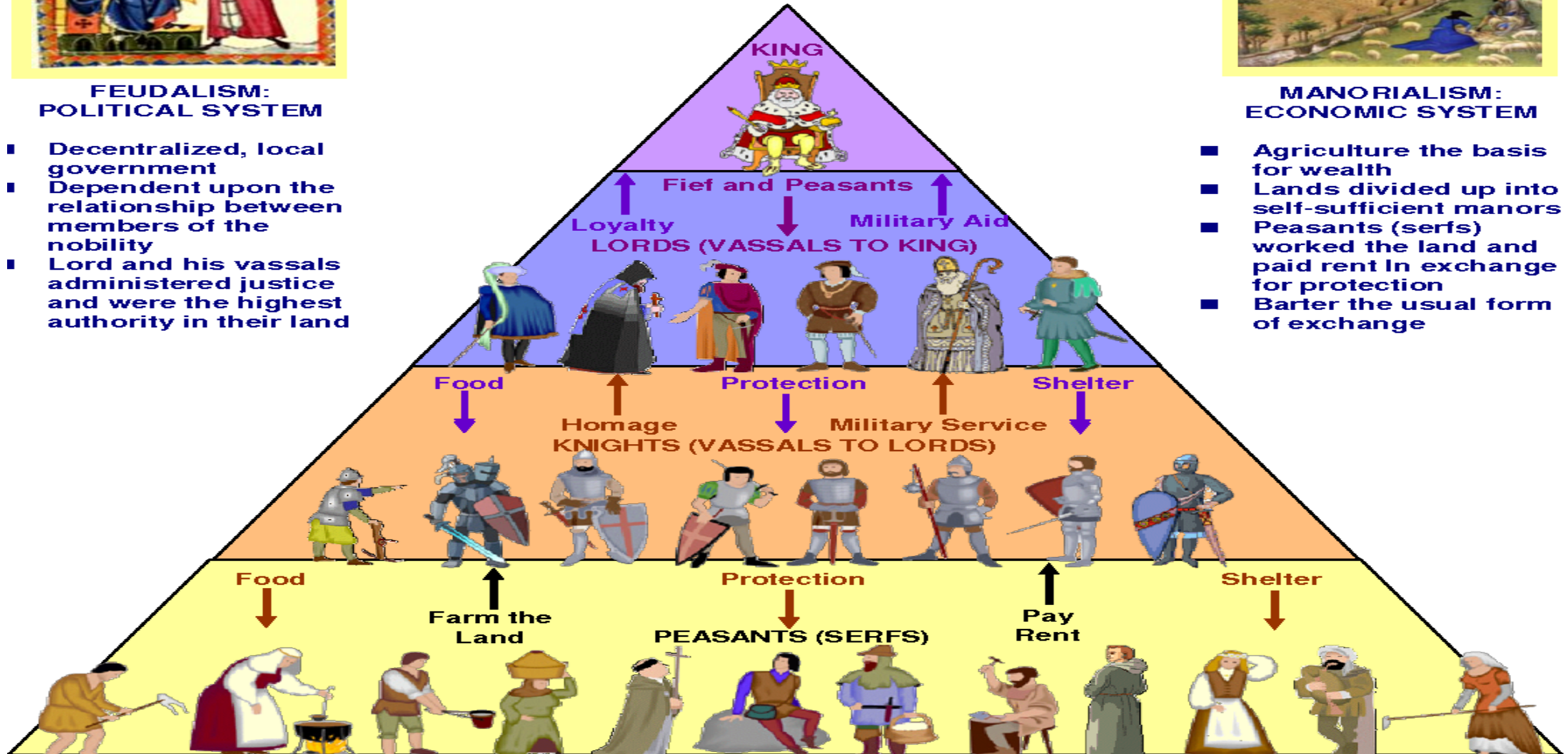
FEUDALISM: POLITICAL SYSTEM

- Decentralized, local government
- Dependent upon the relationship between members of the nobility
- Lord and his vassals administered justice and were the highest authority in their land



MANORIALISM: ECONOMIC SYSTEM

- Agriculture the basis for wealth
- Lands divided up into self-sufficient manors
- Peasants (serfs) worked the land and paid rent in exchange for protection
- Barter the usual form of exchange



The Early Middle Ages

- General decline in intellectual activity
- Education inaccessible to ordinary people;
- Only the monks in the monasteries that were taught how to read and write, for the purpose of re-writing the holy scripts. All education then was conducted in Latin.
- **Aelfric**, the **abbot of Eynsham** (11th century): 1st Latin grammar in **Anglo-Saxon**

Proto-Renaissance (mid-XIII – mid-XIV AD)

- Speculative grammar - *modistae* viewed language as a ‘mirror’ of reality; sought to *explain* grammatical rules.
- The modistae sought one “universal” grammar that would serve as a means of understanding the nature of being.
- The categories of this grammar would correlate with the categories of logic:
 - **nouns & pronouns** were thought to express the metaphysical category of “permanence,”
 - **verbs & participles** expressed “becoming.”
- Speculative grammarians took over Priscian grammar, but relabeled the parts of speech to show their “modes of signifying” → Modistae.

Thomas of Erfurt

- The most influential of the *speculative grammarians* or *Modistae* (later medieval philosophers)
- The notion that a word, once it has been imposed to signify, carries with it all of its syntactical modes, or possible combinations with other words, had been around since the twelfth century. Modistae posited the origins of the *modi significandi* in terms of parallel theories of *modi intelligendi* (modes of understanding) and *modi essendi* (modes of being). → a mix of philosophy, grammar, and linguistics.
- Thomas of Erfurt's *De modi significandi* became the standard Modist textbook in the fourteenth century, though it has since enjoyed even greater fame later thanks to its misidentification as a work of Duns Scotus.

Modistae, a.k.a. the ‘speculative grammarians’

- Were active in northern France, Germany, England, and Denmark in the 13th and 14th centuries.
- Their influence was felt much less in the southern part of Europe, where the somewhat opposing tradition of the so-called "pedagogical grammar" was prevalent.
- The Modist philosophy was first developed in mid-13th century, though it rose to prominence only after its systematization by **Thomas of Erfurt** decades later, in his treatise ***De modis significandi seu grammatica speculativa***, probably written in the first decade of the 14th century.

Theory of Modes

The philosophy of the Modistae was based on a theory of '**modes**' of **meaning** in language:

- modes of being (*modi essendi*),
- modes of understanding (*modi intelligendi*), and
- modes of signifying (*modi significandi*).

To the Modistae, the various **parts of speech** were viewed as representing reality in terms of these modes.

- The *modi essendi* are objectively existent qualities in an object of understanding,
- the *modi intelligendi* the understanding's means of representing the *modi essendi*, and
- the *modi significandi* grammar's means of representing the *modi intelligendi* in language.
-

This corresponds to Aristotle's tripartite semantic theory of *words* representing *concepts* which represent *objects*.

For the Modistae, grammatical forms, the ***modi significandi*** of **verbs**, **nouns**, and **adjectives**, comprise the deep ontological structure of language, which objectively reflects reality.

Their work predicted the concept of **universal grammar**, suggesting that **universal grammatical rules** may be extracted from all living languages.



Foto:

- Mittelalterliche Handschrift aus der Bibliotheca Amploniana, ein Zeugnis für die bedeutendste Schrift des Thomas von Erfurt, der "*Grammatica speculativa*"

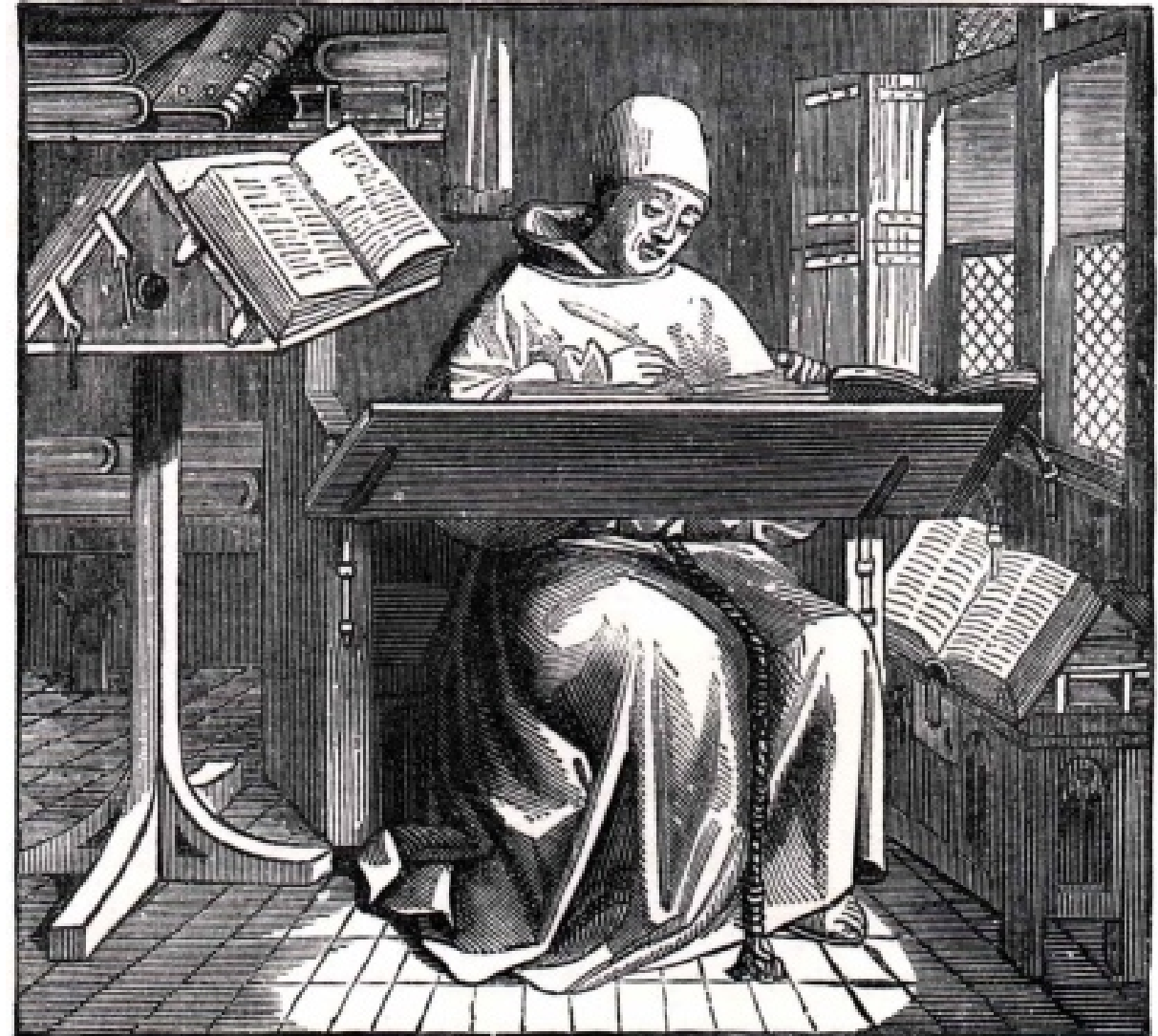
Photo:

- The **medieval*** manuscript from the Amploniana Library – an excerpt from the most significant work by Thomas of Erfurt, *Speculative Grammar*

*Note the spelling: not **Medieval**, as it was once spelt on CNN! 😊

Speculative Grammar: most coherent & theoretical ever

- The speculative grammarians' search for universal grammar has been criticized as the result of the privileged position of Latin in their culture made "universality" seem more likely.
- Nevertheless, speculative grammar was more coherent and theoretical than any previous grammar
- SG investigated ideas still of interest today, such as deep structure, the incorporation of meaning into grammatical systems, and universals



SCRIPTORIUM MONK AT WORK. (From *Lacroix*.)

Medieval Art: Scholasticism

Characteristics:

- ∞ Religious subject matter
- ∞ Important figures are shown as larger than others around them
- ∞ Figures look stiff with little sense of movement
- ∞ Fully clothed



Speculative Grammar – the 2nd great milestone 4 Western tradition

(after the crystallization of Greek thought with the Stoics and Alexandrians)

- Related words and things: the structure of sentences with the physical world; → **signification**.
- Aimed to explore how words (λ) match things perceived by the mind and how they signify reality.
- Since a word cannot signify the nature of reality directly, it must stand for the thing signified in one of its modes or properties;
- Linguistic categories/parts of speech discriminate modes of signification.
- Thus the study of sentences should lead one to the nature of reality by way of the modes of signifying.



Speculative Grammar

- Used Greek / **Priscian** categories/ Parts of Speech.
- Contribution: grammar must **explain** the distinctions between parts of speech.
- Viewed logic and grammar as a basis for the grand account of universal knowledge
- B/4 the **modistae**, grammar was considered in conjunction with other studies or skills (i.e., criticism, preservation of valued texts, foreign-language learning, etc.)



Speculum of Grammar:



- **Greeks' view of grammar** was rather narrow and fragmented;
- **Romans' view** was largely technical.
- **Modistae** (who dealt with language as a *speculum*, "mirror" of reality) inquired into the fundamentals underlying language and grammar. They wondered
 - whether grammarians or philosophers discovered grammar,
 - whether grammar was the same for all languages,
 - what the fundamental topic of grammar was, and
 - what the basic and irreducible grammatical primes are.

Signification was reached by imposition of words on things; i.e., the sign was arbitrary.

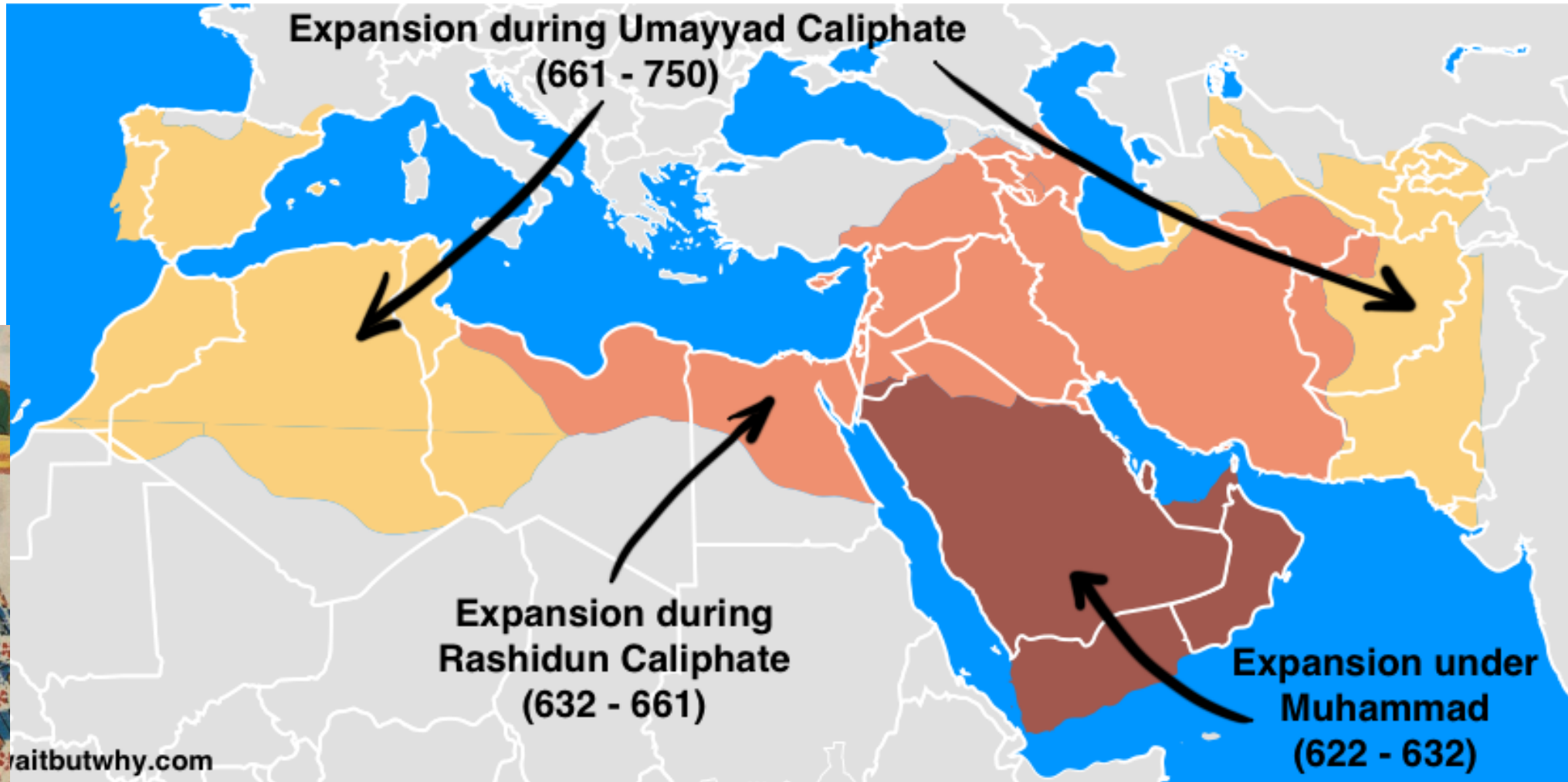
Those questions sound remarkably like current issues of linguistics, which serves to illustrate how slow and repetitious progress in the field is.

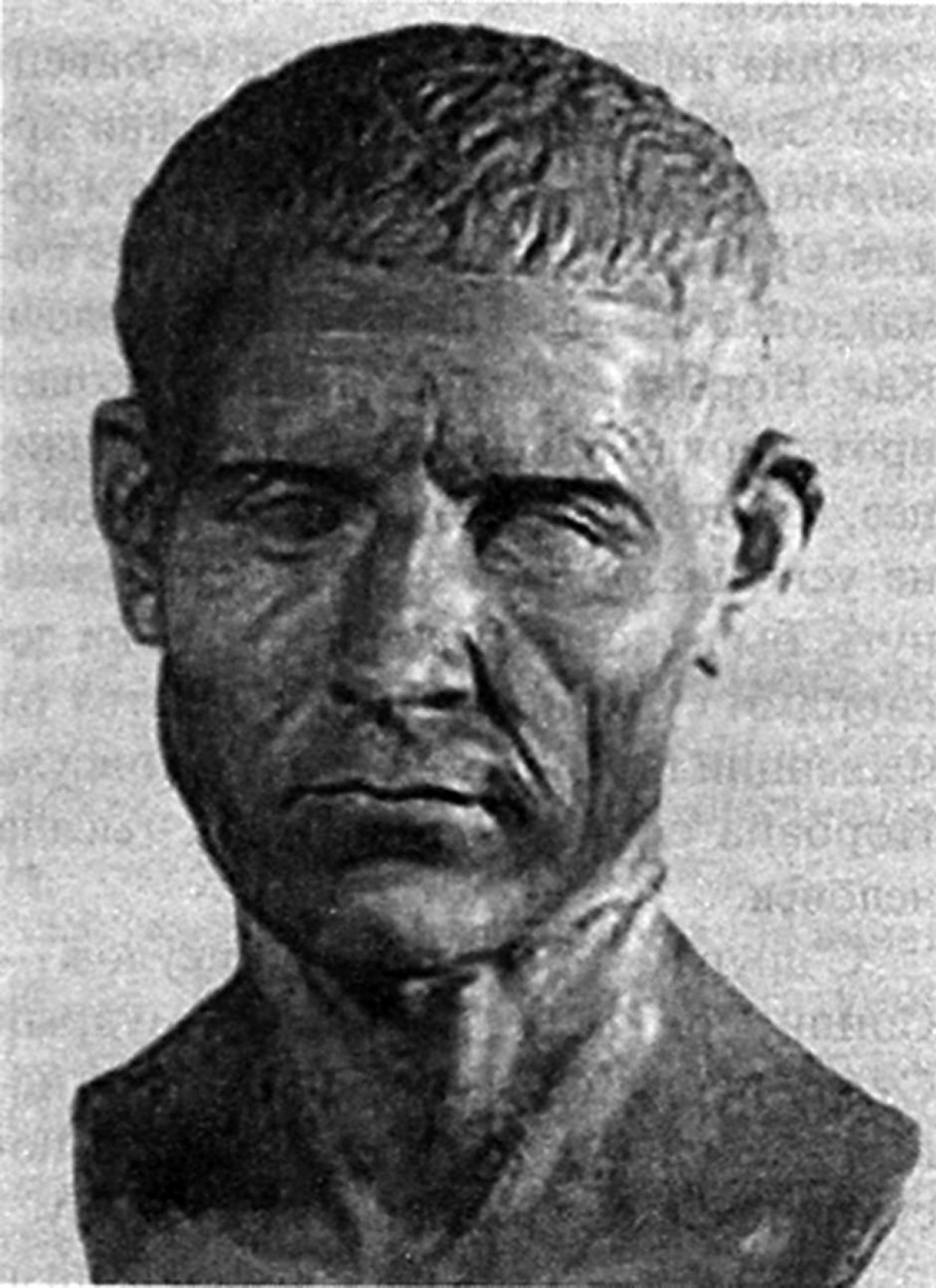
While the modistae accepted, by modern standards, a restrictive set of categories, the acumen and sweep they brought to their task resulted in numerous subtle and fresh syntactic observations.

A thorough study of the medieval period would greatly enrich the discussion of current questions.

European Decline vs. the Rise of Islamic Caliphates

Incessant wars in Europe



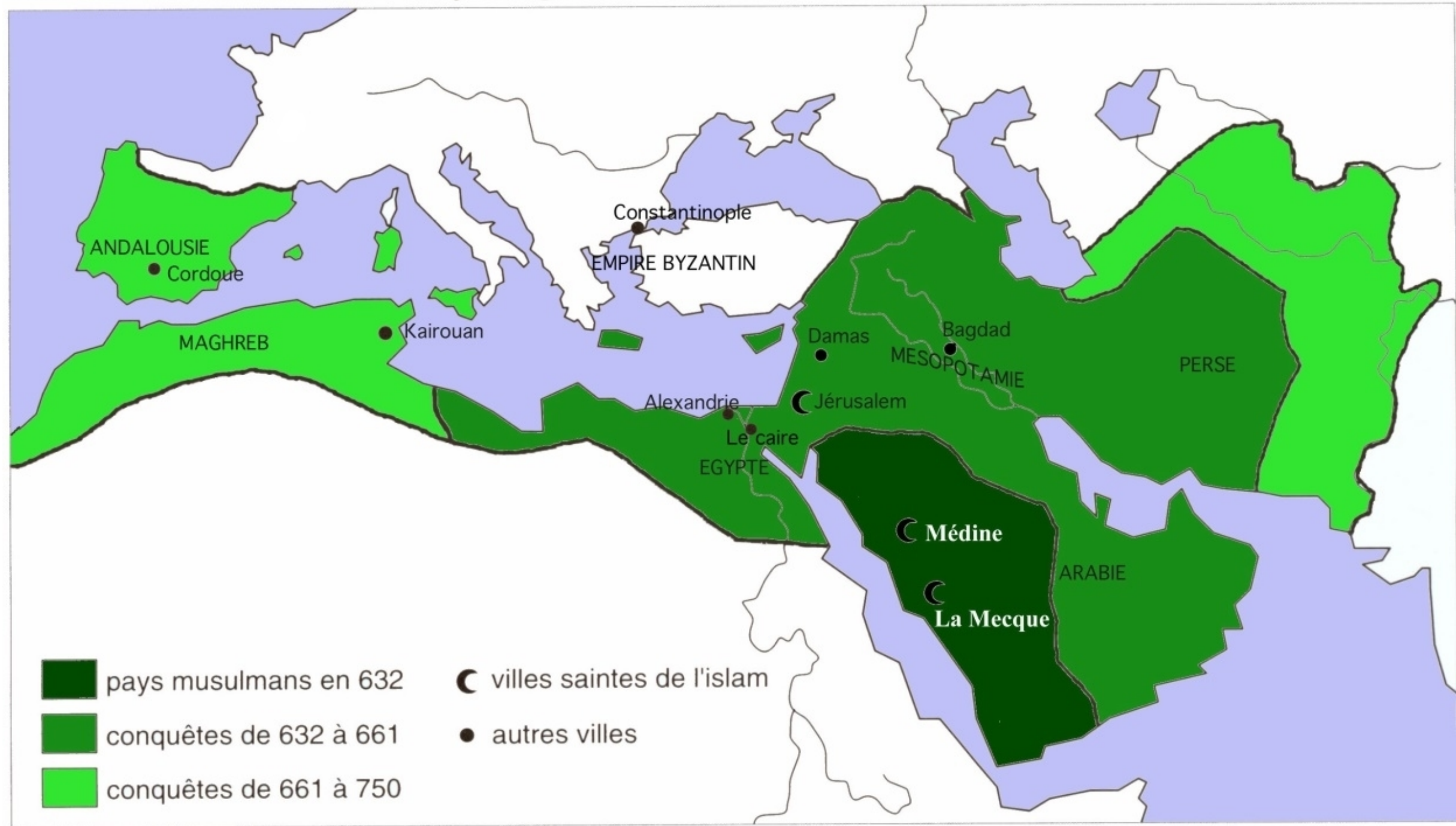


European Decline
vs.
the Rise of Islamic Caliphates

By union,
the smallest states thrive.
By discord,
the greatest are destroyed.

—Sallust (86–35 BC)

■ Le monde musulman au Moyen Âge





Umayyad Caliphate in 750 CE



Roman Empire in 117 CE

The Basrah School: VIII–X centuries AD



An academic library in
Basrah depicted in the 13th
century by Yahya ibn Vaseti

Linguistic thought in Mesopotamia blossomed during the Middle Ages, driven by the religious inspiration to share the Koran with non-Arabic speaking peoples.

Arab scholars of the Basra School:

- **Asma'il (740-828)**: anthologist of pre-Islamic Arab poets; also religious poetry.
- **Sibawaihi (760-793?)**: a celebrated grammarian of the Arabic language. His monumental work is al-Kitāb ("The Book") was frequently used by later scholars.
- **Khalil (718 – betw. 776 & 791)**: an Arab philologist who compiled the first Arabic dictionary and is credited with the formulation of the rules of Arabic prosody.



Avicenna (c. 980 – June 1037)

- One of the most significant thinkers and writers of the Islamic Golden Age
- Of the 450 works he is known to have written, around 240 have survived, including 150 on philosophy and 40 on medicine.[6]
- His most famous works are The Book of Healing – a philosophical and scientific encyclopedia, and The Canon of Medicine – a medical encyclopedia which became a standard medical text at many medieval universities and remained in use as late as 1650.
- Besides philosophy and medicine, Avicenna's work includes writings on astronomy, alchemy, geography and geology, psychology, Islamic theology, logic, mathematics, physics and poetry.



"Now it is established in the sciences that no knowledge is acquired save through the study of its causes and beginnings, if it has had causes and beginnings; nor completed except by knowledge of its accidents and accompanying essentials."

Avicenna

Al-Farabi (870–950 AD):

This art [of logic] is similar to the art of grammar, in that the relation of the art of logic to the intellect and the intelligibles is like the relation of the art of grammar to language and expressions. That is, to every rule for expressions which the science of grammar provides us, there is an analogous [rule] for intelligibles which the science of logic provides us.

The subject matters of logic are the things for which [logic] provides the rules, namely, intelligibles in so far as they are signified by expressions, and expressions in so far as they signify intelligibles.

[Logic] shares something with grammar in that it provides rules for expressions, yet it differs in that grammar only provides rules specific to the expressions of a given community, whereas the science of logic provides common rules that are general for the expressions of every community.

[Alfarabi (1931) 17.5-7, 18.4-7]



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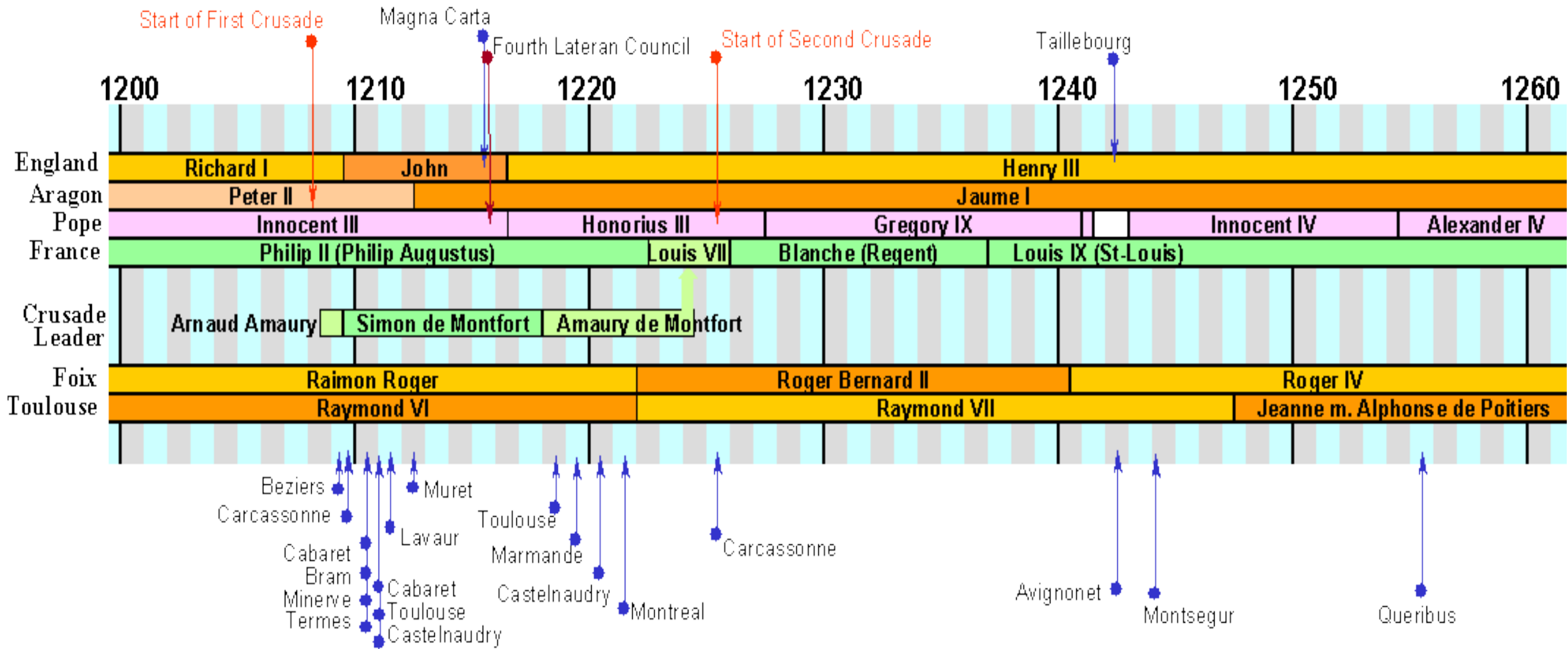


The Crusades

Key to Crusades

- First 1095-1099
- Second 1147-1149
- Third 1189-1192
- Fourth 1202-1204







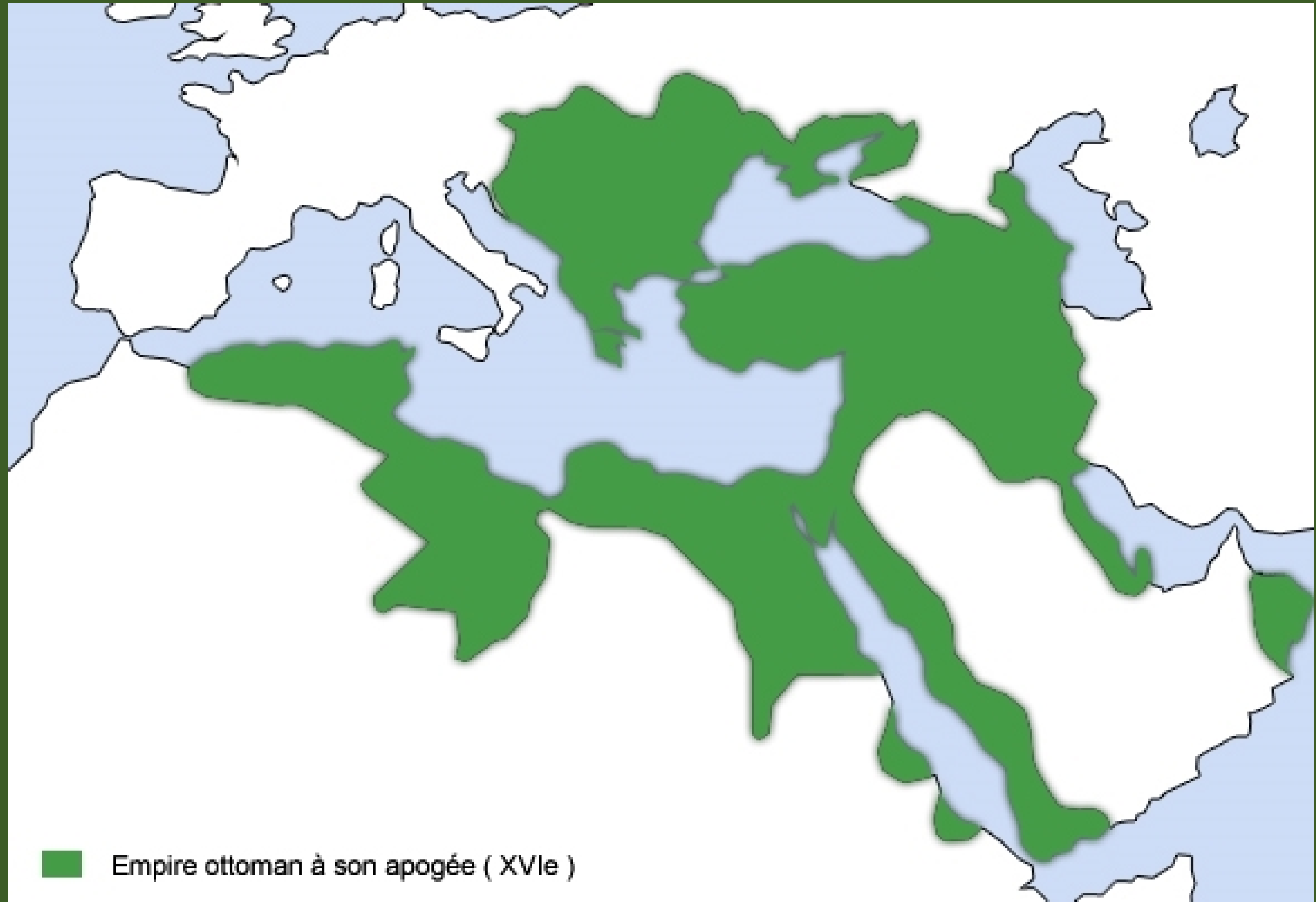












■ Empire ottoman à son apogée (XVIe)

Conclusion

There was a general decline in intellectual activity (and, consequently, in all linguistic thought) in Europe during the Middle Ages. This was due to the prevailing economic conditions and the resulting social relationships of the time: political fragmentation of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire (the Western part of it, anyway) in the 5th century, left most people (subsistence farmers) vulnerable to the many marauding war lords, fighting for land and influence. Seeking protection, the common people were forced to submit to a new form of subjugation (compared to slavery): serfdom. In exchange for military protection, they worked the fields to feed their Lord and his army, and took up arms themselves to fight for the Lord, if called upon.

Trying to survive between constant wars and strife was not a conducive environment for philosophical reflection. There were no books, and no schools – education was mostly the function of the monasteries. The wisdom of the ancients was all but forgotten, kept alive only by the industrious monks, scribbling away in the scattered monasteries, copying the holy texts... Dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, education was mostly based on Latin texts. What vernacular grammars were written during that time, were all based on Latin standards (the traditional, or prescriptive grammars).

People, however, cannot stop thinking: a gradual accumulation of general and technical knowledge, the development of more sophisticated means of production/ technologies, increased trade, the formation of nation states and national languages brought about the highlight of medieval linguistics: the modistae, who attempted to prove that all human languages had common (universal) traits, because they all reflect reality (the physical world).