

Life in Europe in the Year 1000

BY GEORGE FRANKLIN

A few years ago, I ran across a small book by the French historian Henri Focillon entitled "The Year 1000." I opened the book expecting to read about apocalyptic terrors and peasant superstitions.

Instead, I was greeted with a debunking of the notion of widespread fear and trembling. What Focillon showed was rather the birth of European culture, a culture which (along with its extension in North America) deeply affects every person on the planet today.

As I read deeper into the period, I became interested in reconstructing the life of an ordinary person in that time — the life of one of our ancestors (or perhaps ourselves in a previous incarnation) at this critical juncture. I have chosen a village in Lorraine, on the border of present-day France and Germany, as typical of the time. If I err in an overly-bright portrait of our forebears' lives, I hope that it balances the more common tendency to portray the early Middle Ages as a bleak and miserable era.

EUROPE IN THE YEAR 1000

Population: around 30 million (about 10% of today's population).

Largest Cities: Paris, Milan and Venice may have reached 25,000 people. Few cities number 10,000 people.

Terrain: 80% of Northern Europe is forests and wetlands. This will change drastically by 1300.

Literacy: Confined mainly to priests and monks, and not universal even among them.

IT'S THE BEST OF TIMES. And you know it.

Your home, the Duchy of Lorraine, lies on the border of France and Germany. The whole region is in the midst of an economic and cultural revival the likes of which have not been seen since the time of Charlemagne, two centuries earlier.

Like nearly every other person in the Duchy, you are a peasant farmer, just past your thirty-seventh birthday. Not a bad life, when the nobles aren't feuding and tearing up your land with their petty wars. Maybe the Peace of God will put the fear of judgment into them. Something needs to.

Whose MILLENNIUM?

The Millennium? According to the parish priest (the only person in the village who can read a calendar, or cares to), the year is 1000 AD. An itinerant preacher recently warned of impending hellfire and brimstone. But his sermon merely provided fodder for dinner conversations for a few days.

Truth be told, the church calendar has little meaning for your life. 1000 may be a nice round number, but the most important number

to you is 46 — the years since the last Magyar or Viking raid into your part of Lorraine.

After two centuries of terror, the Norse raiders have settled down in northwestern France, and although an invasion of England is rumored, the annual raids into France, the Netherlands, and Germany have abated.

And the Magyar horsemen, like the Vikings, are also recent converts to Christianity. They have promised the Pope that they will give up their raids into central Europe and settle down to exploit the peasants of the Hungarian plains. Christianity finally proves good



The Year 1000 Around the World

(using present-day geographical expressions)

China, recently reunified under the Sung, is the most prosperous and economically productive region in the world. Science and technology are far in advance of the West. Unfortunately, the once-strong connection between the Mediterranean world and China has been sundered for several centuries, and the two cultures are in little contact.

Southeast Asia economically links the flourishing cultures of China and India. Magnificent temples dwarfing anything in Europe adorn the landscape.

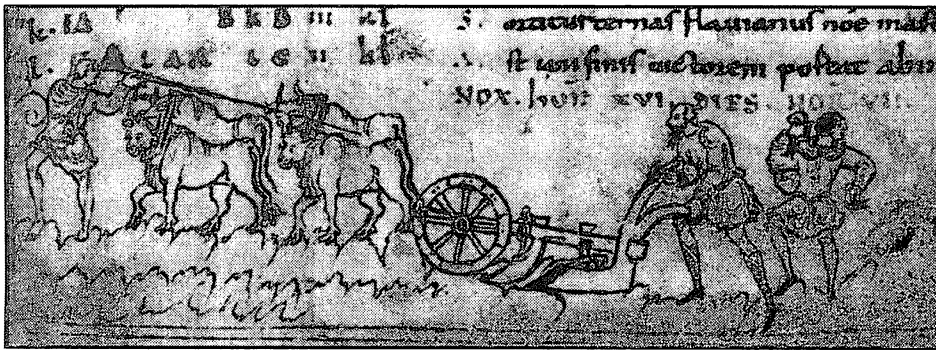
India is a conglomeration of smaller empires. The Tantric form of Buddhism, which emphasizes female deities and magical practices, is spreading from eastern India into Tibet and Nepal.

The world of Islam stretches from northern Spain to Pakistan, reshaping but also preserving the heritage of Greece, Egypt and the Middle East. The written treasures of the ancient world are beginning to pass from Islam into a finally-receptive Northern Europe.

In Africa, the first sub-Saharan states are emerging. Chinese and Indian traders travel the east coast of the continent. In the north, prosperous Islamic states line the Mediterranean, linking Spain and the Middle East.

Jewish people, living primarily around the perimeter of the Mediterranean, have long had a strong role in international trade. Recently, Jewish merchants have begun to settle in Western Germany, facilitating the re-emerging trade with the Islamic Middle East and Northern Africa.

North America comprises primarily hunters and gatherers in the west and north, with woodland farming in the east. In economically more advanced Mexico and Central America, the Toltec empire (Mexico) has succeeded the Mayan empire (Guatemala/Yucatan) as the dominant power. In South America, farming is the norm, with small pre-Incan states lining the Andean west coast.



for something.

Not that it plays much of a role in your life. Sure, every crowned monarch in Europe is now a Christian. What's that to you, beyond the occasional festival or the holiday of some local saint? The old sacred places — springs, wells, ancient trees, mountains — mean a lot more to you than the small stone churches that dot the countryside. And it's the old cycle of the year that matters to you — Samhain, the beginning of the winter months, when spirits walk on Earth; Imbolc, when the seeds lay birthing in the ground; and Beltane, the joyous celebration of fertility and new life.

ABUNDANT FERTILITY

And there is much fertility to be thankful for. A revolution in agriculture is unfolding right before your eyes. Under the auspices of the new-found peace, technological advances such as improved harnesses for oxen and horses, a vast expansion of iron-working in northern Europe, and novel designs for ploughs have wrought a virtual miracle. Regions which scraped out a bare subsistence a century before now have a

small but steady surplus. Trade between regions is expanding, and your village now boasts several fulltime craftspeople — an ironsmith, a leather worker, and a wheel-maker — who make their living without farming.

Not that everything is roses. Unlike the citizens of the northern Italian cities that you long to visit, you are not entirely free. Your land is owned by the Duke of Lorraine. To marry or change residence, you need his dispensation. And every seventh year, you and your neighbors are required to attend a ceremony and swear fealty to the Duke.

So much for formalities. The Duke is a huge landowner, and hardly has time to concern himself with your village. Pay the requisite feudal dues of grain, eggs and milk, show up for road detail a few times a year — who can complain?

You hold your land on a lifetime lease that will pass to your children with payment of a small fee. Your village decides for itself what and how to farm.

And if there are any headaches, everyone knows that there is land aplenty in the east, with nobles there offering generous terms to anyone who will relocate.

COLLECTIVE FARMING

Lured by such promises, your younger brother talks about heading east. But for you, Lorraine is home. For the past twenty years you have worked to build a village council and organize the new “three-field rotation” of crops that has increased harvests by fifty percent.

Your efforts are paying off. Resistance to collective planning of

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Graphics

Left: The stiff formality of medieval court painting may be a conservative response to rapid economic and social change. *From the Munich Gospels of Otto III, c. 1000.*

Above: Few peasants owned more than one or two oxen. Villagers pooled their resources to use the heavy iron ploughs that required a team of oxen. *The month of January, from an early 11th century Canterbury calendar.*

THE YEAR 1000

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crops, planting cycles and to the sharing of oxen and horses has melted as the harvests have grown. And the hardest struggle — your proposal to redistribute the strips of farmland each year, so as to equalize access to the best fields — will probably be adopted this year, as it already has been in many neighboring communities.

With the growing harvest has come a great improvement in your family's diet. Wheat and rye are now plentiful, so the small garden plots within the village can be devoted to vegetables in the warm months: cabbage, carrots, peas and greens. Apples are abundant, as are nuts. Chickens provide eggs, and will be slaughtered along with your pig when winter comes.

Spices — still a luxury, but becoming more common as the agricultural surplus grows — are provided by Jewish traders with connections all the way to China and Indonesia. Cloves, pepper, and mustard help make the winter diet of bread and salted fish and meat more palatable.

SEEING THE WORLD

Almost all of your life is lived within twenty miles of your village. Family outings to fairs in neighboring villages are occasional adventures, and a journey last year to visit your cousins in eastern France stretched your horizons.

Longer travels are less common. As a teen, you were part of a dance troupe that accompanied your landlord to Chartres for the marriage of his eldest daughter. And your uncle loves to talk about the time he journeyed all the way to Jerusalem — the city is in Islamic hands, but still a site of pilgrimage for Christians and Jews.

Your personal dream is to make a pilgrimage to Rome for your fortieth birthday. Tours leave every spring, sponsored by a network of monasteries that grow rich off the largesse of visitors. The month-long journey over the Alps attracts you as much as the several weeks you'll spend seeing the sights in the

eternal city.

Rome isn't for everyone. Word has it that the city is a mere shell of her former glory. Where a half million lived under the Caesars, not 30,000 dwell

A BLESSING FOR A TRAVELLER

I watch you as you go.
With my five fingers I send
Five and fifty angels after you.
God bring you safely home.
May the gate of success be open,
And the gate of good fortune too.
May the gate of the waters be closed to you,
and the gate of weapons as well.

— German, circa 1000 CE

now. The ancient temples and forums have crumbled, and the churches of Venice are said to be far more magnificent.

No matter. The city of Augustus and St. Peter calls to you. And it's not an impossible dream. Your five surviving children (out of nine births) are nearly grown, and with a few good harvests, your family and village will be able to spare you for a season.

You've tried to persuade your young cousin Hans, apprenticed as a stonemason in Strasbourg (a major city of almost 5000 people), to go with you, but his sights turn toward Spain. The northeastern corner is in Christian hands, providing a door into the peninsula. But Hans' real goal is to cross into the Islamic city of Cordoba. This entrepot, ten times the size of the largest Northern European cities, is the center of Islamic and Jewish culture, the glory of the Western world. Philosophy, mathematics and medicine flourish, and the mosques and palaces are spectacular.

But it is especially in the realm of science that Cordoba excels. To a far greater extent than Western Christian cultures, the Spanish and North African branch of Islam has preserved the

writings of the ancient world. Greek scientists such as Aristotle and Archimedes, mere names to Christian scholars, are studied in Cordoba, and their work developed.

Your cousin isn't the only westerner drawn inexorably toward this fount of knowledge. Hans still talks about the time he traveled to Rheims to hear the great Gerbert of Aurillac — recently elected Pope Sylvester II, to the consternation of "true Christians" everywhere — use one of his magnificent wooden armillary spheres and the new-fangled "Arabic numerals" to demonstrate that the earth was a sphere. Only

by clandestine studies with the Moslems could Gerbert have learned such secrets.

MONKS, BISHOPS AND THE PEACE OF GOD

Such studies intrigue Hans. If he had his way, he'd give up stonemasonry and become a monk. It's the monks who are changing the world, he tells you.

They've certainly made a difference in Lorraine. In the aftermath of fighting the Magyars and Vikings, the local nobility had taken to feuding among themselves — which usually meant preying on each others' peasants. Pillaging, crop-burnings, and outright rape and murder have sharpened the anger of working people across Europe.

The civil and church hierarchies — kings and bishops who are themselves nobles with no special power over their peers — have proved incapable of stopping the marauding. But monasteries, frequent targets of the attacks, have formulated a counter-strategy known as the Peace of God or the Truce of God. Monks travel the breadth of western Europe preaching and calling upon the nobility to

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governments, and created a climate where it is simply politically unacceptable to support genetic engineering in agriculture. In Britain, the Labor Party government has been thrown into crisis, with even many of the Party's long-term supporters attacking Prime Minister Tony Blair for supporting the biotechnology industry.

Polite requests to label genetically engineered foods won't save a single monarch butterfly. They won't protect a single farmer or a single journalist from Monsanto's incessant

threats and lawsuits. They won't protect the vast majority of people, whose food choices are far more limited than we often realize, from unknown health hazards. They won't begin to address the wider ethical problems of genetic engineering and other biotechnologies that threaten to transform our health care system and usher in a new era of human cloning and eugenics.

We can no longer settle for halfway measures. Recent corporate mergers in the growing "lifesciences" industry promise a future in which genetic manipulation will rapidly become the

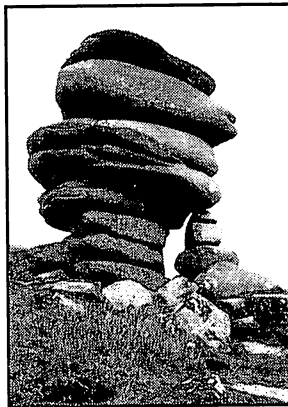
technology of choice in every area of food, medicine and seed production. We need to learn from our sisters and brothers in Europe and Asia, and develop a people's movement against biotechnology that can meaningfully resist all aspects of this industry's mounting assaults on the integrity of life on earth.

Brian Tokar is the author of "Earth for Sale" (South End Press) and "The Green Alternative" (New Society). He is a frequent contributor to Food & Water Journal, teaches at the Institute for Social Ecology and Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, and is a founding member of Northeast Resistance Against Genetic Engineering (NERAGE — www.nativeforest.org/nerage).

This article originally appeared in the Summer 1999 issue of the excellent magazine "Food & Water Journal," 389 Vermont Route 215, Walden, VT 05873, (802) 563-3300. Subscriptions are \$25.

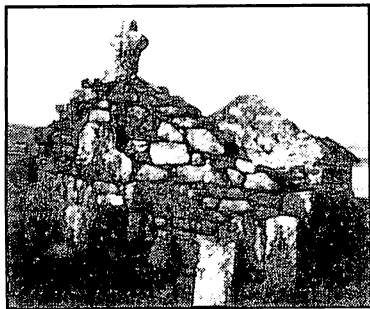
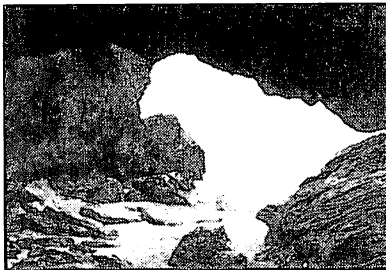
Sounds & Furies invites you to join the next Women's Magical Journey Beltaine in Cornwall April 24 – May 8, 2000

Cornwall, or in the original Celtic, Kernow, is a very special part of the British Isles that has 5000 years of history and pre-history found in the magical landscape of moors, sea, rivers and streams, ancient field patterns and woodlands.



Our journey in Cornwall will be mainly spent in the landscape of West Penwith. The sites include:

- Sancreed holy well with its entrance into the deep dark womb of Mother Earth
- Carn Euny or Boleigh fogou, an underground ritual chamber
- the Men-an-Tol holed stone, with its yonic gateway into rebirth
- Boscaswen-un stone circle with its quartz healing stone
- Rocky Valley with its ancient and enigmatic maze carvings
- the nearby Museum of Witchcraft, and the seashore cave of Holywell Bay with its natural well and inner recess chamber.



We will be in Cornwall in May to welcome in the Spring with Beltaine ceremonies that include a Maypole Dance and the old pagan Obby Oss festival at the fishing port of Padstow. Our guide is Cheryl Straffon, a Goddess-celebrating woman and resident author: *Pagan Cornwall – Land of the Goddess* and *The Earth Goddess – the Celtic and Pagan Legacy of the Land*. We start the journey in Glastonbury with a pilgrimage to The Tor with Kathy Jones, founder of Glastonbury's Goddess Conference. We will also visit Avebury, guided by Chesca Potter, artist and creatrix of the Greenwood Tarot Deck. Fees are on a sliding scale to make the journey as affordable as possible.

For more information, please contact Pat Hogan at:

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foreswear violence in their internecine conflicts.

Amazingly, despite the opposition of the bishops, the movement is taking hold. Noble warlords are reported to have burst into tears of repentance, pledging mutual love with ancient adversaries. And at least for now, the pillaging has eased up. Go, monks!

There is even talk of all of Europe's nobles banding together in a crusade to recapture Jerusalem for Christianity. Realistically, a Christian army wouldn't stand a chance against united Moslem forces, but anything that gets the warlords out of your area is a plus.

AND SO IT GOES

And so life goes on. Repairing a plough keeps you up late one night, while an unseasonal rain lets you sleep in the next morning. One year you sing in the pageant for the village's patron saint; the next, you lead the Maypole dance at Beltane.

The year 1000 comes and goes, for whoever is counting. It's a good life.

THE YEAR 1000: FURTHER READING

- Henri Focillon, "The Year 1000"
- Prudence Jones & Nigel Pennick, "A History of Pagan Europe"
- Marc Bloch, "Feudal Society"
- Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinnser, "A History of Their Own: Women In Europe"
- Georges Duby & Philippe Aries, editors, "A History of Private Life: Revelations of the

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Medieval World"

- Henri Pirenne, "Medieval Cities"
- C. R. Dodwell, "The Pictorial Arts of the West: 800-1200"
- Lynn White, Jr., "Medieval Technology and Social Change"
- Lynn White, Jr., "The Life of the Silent Majority," essay in "Life & Thought in the Early Middle Ages," ed. by Robert Hoyt
- Geoffrey Barraclough, "The Crucible of Europe, 800-1000"
- Robert S. Lopez, "The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages"
- "The Times' Atlas of World History" — excellent maps of this period
- One book to avoid: "A.D. 1000: A World on the Brink of Apocalypse" by Richard Eroses — clueless sensationalism cashing in on the millennium.

George Franklin studies medieval art while listening to rap music.

School of Americas

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is already experienced and for us to carry that torch."

Protests have been staged against the SOA at Ft. Benning annually since 1995.

"This year the police arrested only 65 people. They refused to arrest the others in an effort to diminish the impact of our civil disobedience," Sand explained.

Ft. Benning is the home of the U.S. Army School of the Americas, which protesters say is responsible for training Latin American soldiers to commit human rights atrocities in their home countries. The event was roughly scheduled to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the November 16, 1989 slaying of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her 15-year-old daughter by soldiers trained at the SOA.

[Contributors to this story include: Jon DeCarmine, staff writer of the Independent Florida Alligator, and Barbara J. Walker, Circle Moonhenge Collective and South East Friends of Reclaiming. For more on SEFR, see page 38.]

teach this six-week course. We will use trance, dream work, Companion Self and ritual to explore personal change and transformation. Supported by guides and allies, we will move in and out of trance and dream states to deepen our understanding of the process of change. The class will end with a ritual of transformation and celebration. Six Thursdays, 7 - 10 p.m. Contact Sage, (604) 254-5529, SageGoode@aol.com

Faery Realm Workshop Series — Spring
Sage teaches this series dealing with Human and Faery interaction. The first workshop in the series is Working with Faery Allies, in which we will work with Danu and the Elemental Guardians. We will deepen the journeying through our inner landscape and open to the natural world, bringing these worlds closer together. We will work with Faery Allies to support our own healing and growth and to begin the work of healing the Earth. On the Sunshine Coast. Contact Sage, (604) 254-5529, SageGoode@aol.com

Trance and Aspecting Workshop, Part Two: "Deepening with the Dark Goddess" — Spring weekend workshop

With Sage and Jezebel. We have journeyed with the Dark Goddess and now we deepen our connection to Her and our commitment to Her work. More advanced trance techniques, aspecting and leading trance journeys will be included. In this weekend workshop we will continue the work begun with the Introduction to Trance workshop last spring. Call Jezebel

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British Columbia Events

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contact Carol Kaye/Sisterhood of Avalon, (604) 736-1807 or Pat Hogan/Sounds & Furies, (604) 253-7189, path@lynx.bc.ca

Rites of Passage — Starts January 6
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