**Guilds**

During the 1100s, merchants, artists, bankers, and other professionals grouped themselves together in business associations called guilds. The bankers belonged to the banking guild, the bakers belonged to the baking guild.

**Original Purpose of the Guilds**

The purpose of the guilds was to keep each member’s territory exclusive. If you were a baker, your guild promised you a certain amount of space before another baker could build a shop. This removed any chance of real competition. That was not the only regulation established to eliminate competition. Guilds had strict rules on how much a storekeeper could charge. Everyone had to charge the same price for the same goods and no one could advertise or promote their goods. All workers had to be paid the same, so that the best workers could not be enticed away with better wages somewhere else, and everyone had to satisfy the quality standards set by their respective guild. No one was allowed to sell shoddy goods.

**Climbing the Ladder of Success**

People could work their way up to positions of power, and ultimately own their own shop, if they qualified.

• **Apprentice:** An apprentice was at the bottom of the ladder. During the period an apprentice was learning a skill, he received food, a place to sleep, and training, but he was not paid.

• **Journeyman:** After he had learned something about his craft, he could move up to the level of journeyman. A journeyman was paid a little money, along with free food and a place to sleep. A journeyman could only work under a master. To become a master, a journeyman had to submit a sample of his work—a “masterpiece,” to a

committee of masters in his guild. If they approved his work, he could set up shop in a place assigned to him by the guild and become a master himself.

• **Master:** At the top of the ladder were people who owned their own stores. Owners were called “masters.”

**Benefits of the Guild System**

Besides all the business reasons to belong to a guild, guilds also provided medical care and employee benefits. If you were out of work because your shop had burned down, the guild would care for you until you rebuilt your shop. If you were insured, the same thing would happen. Guilds also arranged for social occasions and festivals.

**Taxes**

The guilds made sure that all shop owners paid taxes to the king. This kept the kings on their side. Soon, kings began to depend upon shop owners for many of their needs including income from the taxes this new middle class paid the kingdom. Kings, and in some cases nobles, granted towns a charter that said they had the right to control their own business and affairs, as long as they continued to pay taxes to whomever had granted the charter.

**City-States**

Some towns grew so large that they acted as independent city-states. This was especially true in Italy.

**Teacher Guilds: Education for the New Middle Class**

As the towns grew, leaders in the new middle class realized that there was a need for lawyers and courts. If they were going to rule themselves, they needed a system of ruling, but almost no one knew how to read or write. To fix this, one of the towns created a “university,” which was a school separate from the monasteries and cathedral schools. The “university” was not a single place. School was held in rented rooms or in courtyards. Books were scarce. Teachers read to students, who then had to memorize what they heard quickly without the benefit of anything to see, except perhaps a tablet. Classes met on a regular schedule. Not just anyone could be a student. You had to pass a test and be accepted. These universities soon became known as teacher guilds. By the end of the 1200s, teacher guilds (universities) had sprung up all over Europe. There were over a thousand students at any one time studying Roman law, Latin classics, the teachings of Islamic scholars, and the philosophy of that famous ancient Greek, Aristotle. Students who attended the universities were not the sons of nobles, they were the sons of merchants. When literature and art were added to the curriculum, there was clearly a stirring, the beginning of the rebirth of culture. The success of the universities shows that things were changing, and they were changing rapidly.

**Directions: Answer the questions below in complete sentences.**

**Questions:**

1. What was the original purpose of the guilds?

2. What purpose did teacher guilds serve?

3. What was the job of an apprentice?

4. What was the job of a journeyman?

5. What did the guilds require you to do before you could open your own shop?

6. Why did guilds want to control the price of goods?

7. Why did guilds wish to reduce or eliminate competition?

8. Why did guilds wish to standardize quality of goods?