Overview of major developments in the age of the Western medieval manuscript

Politics

rapid spread of Christianity
476 last Roman emperor deposed
Rise of “barbarian” kingdoms
  e.g. Anglo-Saxons in England, involves de-Christianization but re-Christianization, esp from Celtic monasticism
  e.g. Frankish kingdom:
    Merovingian dynasty (5th-8th)
    Carolingian dynasty (CM crowned emperor 800)

Culture

spread of codex
rise of monasticism, often inspired by rule of St Benedict (480-547)
rise of vernaculars, Latin remains language of church and learning
Irish monks introduce space between words (6th-7th)
7th ct rise of Islam; Islamic conquest of Spain starts 710
“Carolingian Renaissance” improved education

1000-1300 increasing population, urbanization, wealth, trade

  Paper first produced in Spain (10th), in Italy late 11th
  Cathedral schools (up to 100 pupils), e.g. in Paris 10th-11th
  First universities (1180s): Oxford and Bologna, then Paris
  Recovery of Aristotle through translations from Arabic or Greek
  13th ct: scholasticism in the universities; based on commentary on authoritative texts (Aristotle in the arts, Lombard’s Sentences in theology)
  Pecia system of mss reproduction in Paris
  Foundation of mendicant orders: Franciscans and Dominicans (esp active in preaching and teaching at universities)
  13th ct paper produced North of the Alps
  University libraries founded (e.g. 1367 at Oxford)

1337-1453 Hundred Year’s War between F and England

Humanism starts in Italy (e.g. Petrarch 1304-74) as a reaction to scholasticism, with revival of classical Latin language and rhetoric

1453 Fall of Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire