

## Period Overview and Supporting Information

**Life in fifteenth-century Europe:** In the period before industrialization and urbanization, and long before the digital age, the majority of Europeans were poor and illiterate. Most people worked on farms, tending crops or animals. A tiny minority formed a wealthy aristocracy that owned most of the land and wielded all of the political power. But more powerful even than them was the Church.

**The Church:** In the fifteenth century, the Church—no one called it the Catholic Church, because until the Reformation there were no other churches in the West—was extremely important. Most governments were small, weak, or fragmented. The Church was not only the spiritual institution of most Europeans, but was also the largest, wealthiest, and most powerful institution in all of western Europe.

**Abbey, monastery, nunnery:** Abbeys, monasteries, convents, and nunneries are all Catholic institutions in which monks and nuns lived and worshipped, under the authority of the Abbot or Abbess. A monastery is a male community; convent and nunnery are synonyms for female communities. Usually, either one can be referred to as an abbey; in *Changeling*, a shared central abbey is set between a monastery and a nunnery. Abbeys were common in Europe. They offered food and shelter to strangers and travelers.

**Prayer times:** Life in a monastery or convent was highly regulated and included frequent prayer. Monks and nuns daily prayed the Liturgy of the Hours, a list of prayers recited at different times of day. In the fifteenth century the Liturgy of the Hours had eight scheduled prayer times: Matins (at midnight), Lauds (at dawn), Prime (in the early morning), Terce (at midmorning), Sext (at noon), None (in midafternoon), Vespers (at dusk), and Compline (at night before going to bed).

**Lay sister:** In the fifteenth century, convents had a social hierarchy that reflected that of the larger society. Elite women who could bring a dowry to the convent became sisters, but poorer women from illiterate peasant families came to the convent penniless and became lay sisters. Lay sisters did menial work—domestic chores, agricultural work, spinning—while the sisters spent their time in prayer. In places where sisters avoided contact with the world, lay sisters were the nunnery's link to the outside—they would take the convent's products to market, talk to outsiders, and greet visitors. In other words, while on paper a convent was a house of God in which all were equal, in practice convents—like the rest of Europe—had ladies who did not work and servants who did.

**Numbering systems:** Today we use what are called Arabic numerals. These are the digits 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, used in a place-value notation system in which the same numeral can have different values depending on where it is placed; for example, the numeral 1 would have a value of 1 in the right-hand column, but a value of 10 in the next column to the left. In Luca and Isolde's time, however, most people in the West still used Roman numerals, where the numerals are I, V, X, L, C, D, and M, and they always have the same value no matter where in a figure they are located. Arabic numerals first appeared in the West in the tenth century, and were spreading quickly through Europe after the invention of movable-type print in the mid-fifteenth century—the very time that *Changeling* takes place. Arabic numerals permit much

more advanced types of calculations; they would be very exciting to someone who “thinks about numbers,” as Luca does.

**Changeling:** In the village he grew up in, Luca was rumored to be a changeling, a fairy baby that had been switched with a human child and left to be raised in its place by human parents (though changelings could also be troll or elf babies, and the term could also refer to the human baby that had been spirited away). Changeling stories were often used to explain a child with abilities or looks that did not run in the family, as when Luca’s poor, illiterate, and apparently infertile parents suddenly found themselves the mother and father of a handsome and clever son. Sometimes, rumors of changelings also circulated about wealthy or powerful families: that the heir to the fortune, or the throne, was not the true heir.

**Fall of Constantinople:** After its decline in the fifth century, the Roman Empire had divided into two parts: the eastern half, called the Byzantine Empire, used Greek as its learned language and had Constantinople as its capital, while the western part—western Europe—used Latin as its scholarly language and had Rome as its capital. The two parts had their tensions, but both were Christian areas. Then, in the spring of 1453, the Ottoman (or Turkish) empire laid siege to and captured the city of Constantinople. To fifteenth-century Christians, the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans—which spelled the end of the Byzantine empire—was a catastrophe. They feared that the Muslim Turks might go on to conquer the rest of Europe and to stamp out Christianity. Many thought that the fall of Constantinople was a sign that the End of Days was coming.

**End of Days:** Medieval Christians believed that Christ’s second coming was imminent. They were always on the lookout for signs that the End of Days, in which a series of major disasters would strike and Christ would return to earth, was approaching. Some took the fall of Constantinople to be a harbinger of the End of Days—Constantinople was, after all, a major center of Christian authority, the Rome of the East—and became extremely anxious about the fate of the Church, humanity, and the world.

**Stigmata:** Stigmata are marks that miraculously appear, without any physical cause, on a person’s body, in the places where Jesus’s body would have been marked by his crucifixion. The most common stigmata appear on the palms of the sufferer’s hands, but they can also be on the feet, the chest, or the brow (where Jesus wore a crown of thorns during his crucifixion). Throughout history, most people with stigmata—called stigmatics—have been women. When *Changeling* takes place, one well-known stigmatic was Catherine of Siena, a nun who lived in the 1300s and was declared a saint by Pope Pius II in 1461.

**The Golden Fleece:** In Greek mythology, the Golden Fleece is the fleece of a sheep or ram that was winged and had golden wool; it is part of the story of Jason and his Argonauts. But there are also many stories about ways that one can use a regular sheep’s fleece to collect tiny particles of gold from running streams. One very old account is from Georgia in eastern Europe and dates from the fifth century BCE. Fleece were submerged in a stream and would catch tiny flecks of gold from deposits upstream. The fleeces would then be hung to dry before the gold was combed out. In parts of Georgia, people still pan for gold using fleece.

**Children raised by wolves:** There are many myths and stories about feral or wild children, said to have been raised by wolves or other animals. In Roman mythology, the city of Rome was founded by twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, who were nursed and raised by a she-wolf. Throughout human history there have been other stories of children raised in the wild by wolves or other animals. Few have ever been documented as factual, but the compelling notion that animal parents could raise human children, along with the hope that children lost in the wilderness might still be alive, means that these stories flourish even today.