

Europe

Introduction to the Middle Ages



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Feudal Society in the Middle Ages

Renaissance and Reformation

European Expansion

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.





Timeline





The geography of Europe

Europe is one of the world's seven **continents**. It is the second smallest continent but is part of the larger landmass known as Eurasia, which is made up of Europe and **Asia**.



Europe has the third highest population of the seven continents. Over 700 million people live in Europe.

There are approximately 50 countries within Europe. Some share a currency (the **Euro**) to make trading easier.

Currently 28 countries are member states in the **European Union**, which is an economic and political union.



Despite its small size, Europe's geography and **climate** are very diverse. For example:

- southern Europe has a number of mountain ranges, such as the **Alps**, while the north is much flatter
- southern Europe is quite warm and sunny compared to northwestern Europe, which is cooler and wetter
- people live nearer to the coast in southern Europe and further inland in northern Europe.



 **What else do you know about Europe?** 



Much of Europe was a part of the **Roman Empire**. By the third century BC, the empire had grown so much that it could no longer be ruled entirely from Rome and was split into an eastern empire and a western empire.



The eastern empire later became known as the **Byzantine Empire** and was ruled from Constantinople. It survived until the fifteenth century, when Constantinople was conquered by the Muslim Ottoman Empire.

The western empire, governed from Rome, fell in 476 AD, when the emperor, Romulus Augustus, was overthrown.





The fall of Rome in 476 AD is generally given as the start date for the **Middle Ages**, which lasted until around 1500.

The Middle Ages is typically divided into the Early Middle Ages (c.476–1000), which is sometimes referred to as the **Dark Ages**, and the Later Middle Ages (c.1000–1500).

Some of the main features of medieval Europe include:

- the dominance of the Christian Church
- the development and decline of a feudal society
- the growth of trade
- the development of legal systems which have contributed to modern law and democracy.





The major powers





The Roman Empire started to break down due to invasions by other tribes in Europe. Later, Europe began to experience invasions from elsewhere.

The **Vikings**, who came from Scandinavia, first appeared in the 700s. They were **raiders** who invaded Europe to **plunder** (seize goods) and destroy villages before returning home.

Later, some Vikings decided to settle in the areas they invaded. For example, in England they settled in York, which they called Jorvik. The area controlled by the Vikings became known as the **Danelaw**.



Why do you think they decided to settle?

Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Emperor **Constantine** I (306–337 AD). During the Middle Ages, Europe experienced invasions by **pagans**, such as the Vikings. Despite this, Christianity spread further across Europe after the collapse of Rome in 476 AD.

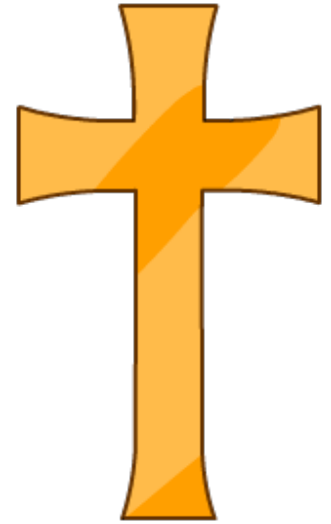


- **Monks** were part of religious orders and lived in isolated communities. They also provided schooling and health care and preserved important writings in their libraries.
- **Missionaries** would travel around Europe and try to convert people to Christianity. Many were sent by the Pope.

Can you name any famous missionaries?

The Church became the center of medieval life. The Church:

- conducted major ceremonies in people's lives, including baptism, marriage and last rites
- cared for the sick and poor
- owned land, which peasants worked on
- set up some of the earliest universities.



Individuals within the Church could also be very influential. Church leaders often held important positions in government. Important books and documents were often written and stored in church and monastery libraries because monks and churchmen could read and write.

Can you think of any other ways the Church influenced medieval life?

Christianity, and the Roman Catholic **Pope** in particular, faced a number of challenges in the Middle Ages.

- In 1054, the Christian Church split into the **Roman Catholic Church** and the **Eastern Orthodox Church**, after Pope Leo IX of Rome and Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople excommunicated each other.
- During the fourteenth century, there was a **dual papacy**. This means that two different popes were elected: Urban VI in Rome and Clement VII in Avignon, France. In 1409, the Council of Pisa introduced a third pope, Alexander V. Eventually, those claiming to be the Pope either resigned or died and in 1417, a single Pope, Martin V, was elected.



The **Crusades** were a series of religious wars fought from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries over the **Holy Land** (modern-day Israel, especially Jerusalem) which is an important religious site for Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

From the 1070s, the Muslim Seljuq Turks seized control of the Holy Land and it became increasingly difficult for Christian pilgrims to visit. In 1095, Pope **Urban II** launched a campaign to take back the Holy Land.

A wide variety of people took part in the Crusades, including kings, knights and even an army of children.



The First Crusade lasted from 1096 until 1099. The crusaders successfully captured Jerusalem and set up a Christian kingdom. However, this did not last.

In 1187, the Muslim ruler, **Saladin**, recaptured Jerusalem.

Western and Byzantine forces began to fight for control of the Christian world.

In 1212, around 10,000 children from France, Germany and the Netherlands set out to recapture Jerusalem. Many died or were sold as slaves.



Despite two centuries of fighting, by the end of the thirteenth century, the crusaders had failed to capture the Holy Land.

The “**Catholic Kings**”, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, went to great lengths to unite Spain under a single, Catholic religion.

The **Spanish Inquisition** was introduced in 1478 to find and punish **heretics** (people who oppose the dominant religion), and to check the behaviour of converts.

The unity Ferdinand and Isabella wanted was held back by the **Moors** (Muslims) living in Granada. They launched a military campaign and Granada was conquered in 1492.



1492 also marked the forced expulsion of Jews from Spain.



Medieval society was very traditional and was influenced by the teachings of the Church. Men generally held the most powerful positions.

Women would were expected to complete the domestic chores and raise children. **Heirs** were very important in rich and royal families.

However, some women did become very powerful.

Eleanor of Aquitaine became Duchess of Aquitaine in 1137. She married Louis VI of France and later, Henry II of England.

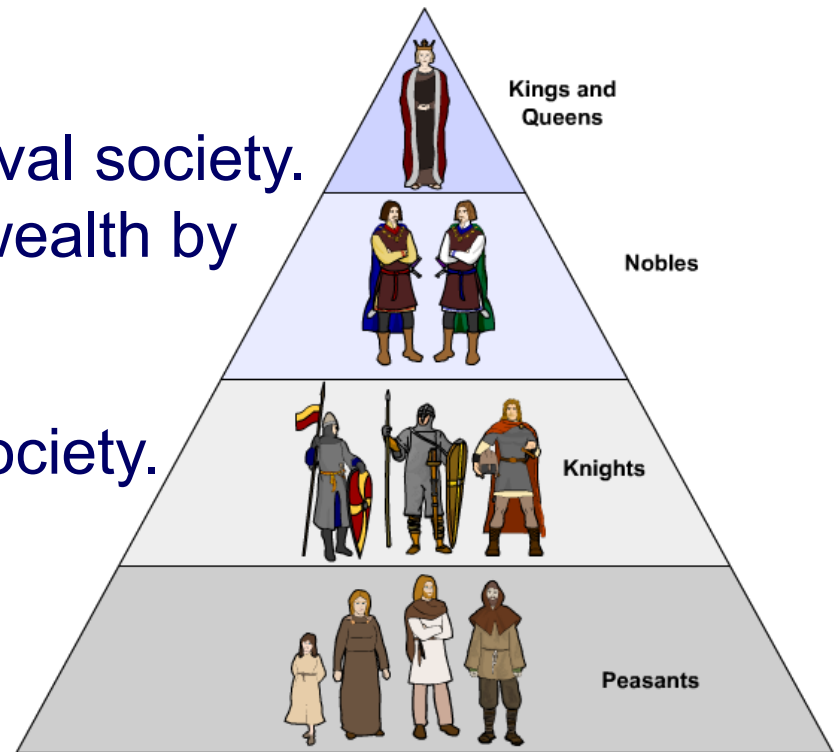


Can you name any powerful medieval women?

Although the nature of society was influenced by the Church, the structure of medieval society was based on the exchange of goods and services. This is called a **feudal** society.

The king sat at the top of medieval society. He was followed in power and wealth by the nobility and knights.

Peasants sat at the bottom of society. Life for peasants was difficult. They did not own their own land and had low wages.



How does this compare to other societies you have learned about?



Towns grew during the Middle Ages. Opportunities to make money allowed peasants to move away from manors and look for new work. Many of those who lived in towns were traders and craftsmen who lived above their stores.

In the towns, merchants and craftsmen developed **guilds**. Guilds were groups of people who worked within the same trade. They checked the quality of goods produced and gave members protection against unfair prices.

Money was increasingly used to buy goods from merchants. This replaced the old system of trading goods and services in exchange for other goods. Banks were introduced to lend money and convert coins.





Flanders, in Belgium, was a major center of European trade during the Middle Ages, particularly for cloth. Other **trade routes** developed due to warfare and exploration.

The Crusades led to the increase of trade between Europe and the Middle East. Europe gained:

- improved weaponry
- access to Classical Greek and Roman learning.
- sugar, apricots and rice

Fifteenth-century **exploration** led to the development of trade routes between Europe and Africa. Europeans traded cloth, iron and copper and returned with textiles, new food items and slaves.

Can you name any famous explorers?





Medieval developments in the English legal system are believed to have contributed to modern **democracy**.

One of the major legal developments of the Middle Ages was the signing of the **Magna Carta** by King John in 1215. This was the first time in history that limits were placed on a king's power.

Magna Carta

No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights of possessions, or outlawed or exiled ... except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land.

Can you find any similarities between this and the U.S. Constitution?





The Magna Carta gave nobles the right to advise the king through the **Great Council**. This took place when the king would meet with his most powerful and wealthy subjects to discuss the ruling of the kingdom.

The term “**Parliament**” was first used in 1236 to describe meetings like those held by the Great Council.

Habeas corpus is used to determine whether a person has been lawfully imprisoned. Although not an official law until 1679, it has been suggested that it dates back to Anglo-Saxon times.



How have these medieval developments contributed to modern legal systems?



Keywords

