

European History

The Middle Ages and Renaissance

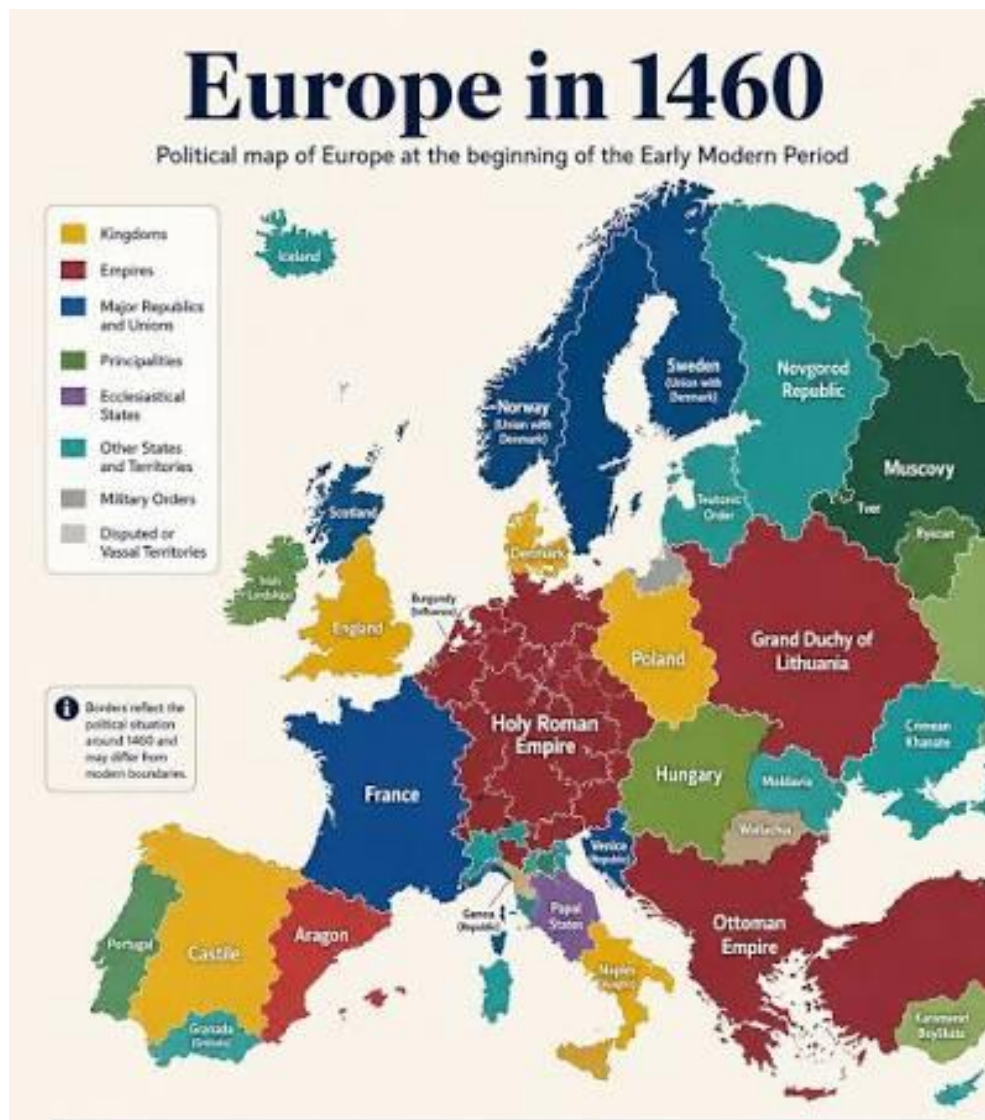


www.beaconmedia.com.au

The Middle Ages

The Middle Ages, or Medieval Times, in Europe was a long period of history from 500 AD to 1500 AD. It covers the time from the fall of the Roman Empire (Western half), and coincides with the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

Now that Rome was gone, there was no long the peace and protection that Rome had given. Instead, people turned to powerful local lords for protection, and to the Christian church for guidance.



Activity

List as many countries as you can in the Western half of the Roman Empire. We will focus on these countries for our study on The Middle Ages. Use today's country names.

Middle Ages, Medieval Times, Dark Ages: What's the Difference?

When people use the terms Medieval Times, Middle Ages, and Dark Ages they are generally referring to the same period of time. The Dark Ages is usually referring to the first half of the Middle Ages from 500 to 1000 AD.

476 AD marked the fall of the Roman Empire, (the Western half). Rome had ruled much of Europe. Now much of the land would fall into confusion as local kings and rulers tried to grab power. This is the start of the Dark Ages or the Middle Ages.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, a lot of the Roman culture and knowledge was lost. This included art, technology, engineering, and history. Historians know a lot about Europe during the Roman Empire because the Romans kept excellent records of all that happened. However, the time after the Romans is "dark" to historians because there was no central government recording events. This is why historians call this time the Dark Ages.

Although the term Middle Ages covers the years between 500 and 1500 throughout the world, this timeline is based on events specifically in Europe during that time. Go [here](#) to learn about the Islamic Empire during the Middle Ages.

The Feudal System

The basic government and society in Europe during the Middle Ages was based around the feudal system. Small communities were formed around the local lord and the manor. The lord owned the land and everything in it. He would keep the peasants safe in return for their service. The lord, in return, would provide the king with soldiers or taxes.

Service for Land

Under the feudal system land was granted to people for service. It started at the top with the king granting his land to a baron for soldiers all the way down to a peasant getting land to grow crops.

The Manor

The centre of life in the Middle Ages was the manor. The manor was run by the local lord. He lived in a large house or castle where people would gather for celebrations or for protection if they were attacked. A small village would form around the castle which would include the local church. Farms would then spread out from there which would be worked by the peasants.

Hierarchy of Rulers

King - The top leader in the land was the king. The king could not control all of the land by himself, so he divided it up among the Barons. In return, the Barons pledged their loyalty

and soldiers to the king. When a king died, his firstborn son would inherit the throne. When one family stayed in power for a long time, this was called a dynasty.

Bishop - The Bishop was the top church leader in the kingdom and managed an area called a diocese. The Catholic Church was very powerful in most parts of Medieval Europe and this made the Bishop powerful as well. Not only that, but the church received a tithe of 10 percent from all the people. This made some Bishops very rich.

Barons and Nobles- The Barons and high-ranking nobles ruled large areas of land called fiefs. They reported directly to the king and were very powerful. They divided up their land among Lords who ran individual manors. Their job was to maintain an army that was at the king's service. If they did not have an army, sometimes they would pay the king a tax instead. This tax was called shield money.

Lords and Knights - The lords ran the local manors. They also were the king's knights and could be called into battle at any moment by their Baron. The lords owned everything on their land including the peasants, crops, and village.

Peasants or Serfs

Most of the people living in the Middle Ages were peasants. They had a hard rough life. Some peasants were considered free and could own their own businesses like carpenters, bakers, and blacksmiths. Others were more like slaves. They owned nothing and were pledged to their local lord. They worked long days, 6 days a week, and often barely had enough food to survive.

Interesting Facts about the Feudal System

- Around 90 percent of the people worked the land as peasants.
- Peasants worked hard and died young. Most were dead before they reached 30 years old.
- The kings believed they were given the right to rule by God. This was called "divine right".
- Lords and Barons swore oaths of homage and fealty to their kings.
- The Lord held absolute power over the fief or manor including holding court and deciding punishments for crimes.

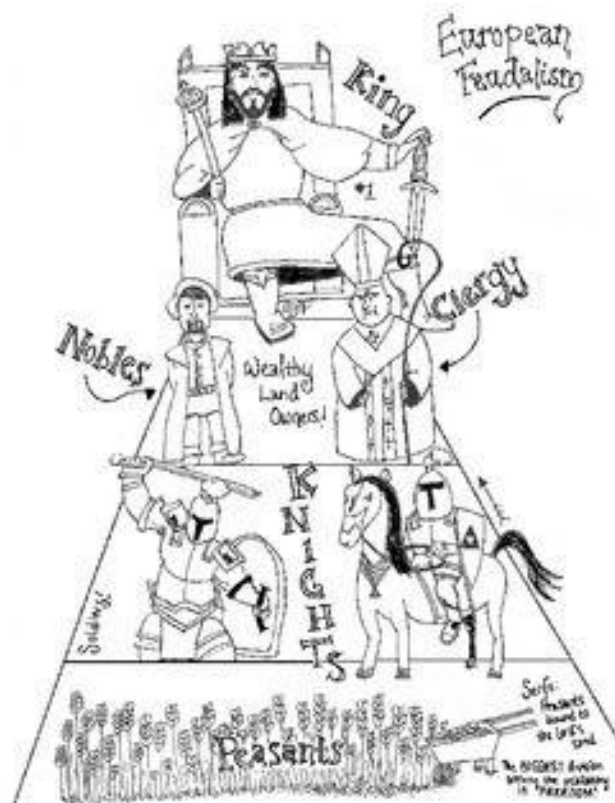
Drawings showing various forms of dress worn by different classes of people in society – king, nobles, peasants



Questions

1. Who was the top leader in the land with the feudal system?
2. What was life like for the majority of the people that lived in the Middle Ages under the feudal system?
3. What building, owned by the local lord, was the centre of daily life in the feudal system?
4. Who was the leader of the Catholic Church in a kingdom?
5. True or False: The Bishops of the Catholic Church were typically poor and had little power in the kingdom.
6. Who owned everything in a village, including the crops, town, and peasants?
7. Who reported directly to the king and ruled large areas of land called fiefs?
8. What was the responsibility of the Baron?
9. When a king died, who would typically take over the throne?
10. What did the peasants get in return for serving and working for their local lord?
11. List the hierarchy of the Feudal society from the highest to the lowest.

Check your answers on the next page. Give yourself a score.



1. The king
2. They worked hard as peasant farmers
3. The manor
4. The bishop
5. FALSE
6. The lord
7. The baron
8. He reported directly to the king and maintained an army.
9. His firstborn son
10. Protection from invaders
11. King, nobles and clergy, knights, peasants

Castles

Why did they build Castles?

During the Middle Ages much of Europe was divided up between lords and princes. They would rule the local land and all the people who lived there. In order to defend themselves, they built their homes as large castles in the centre of the land they ruled. They could defend from attacks as well as prepare to launch attacks of their own from their castles.

Originally castles were made of wood and timber. Later they were replaced with stone to make them stronger. Castles were often built at the top of hills or where they could use some natural features of the land to help with their defence. After the Middle Ages castles weren't built as much, especially as larger artillery and cannon were designed that could easily knock down their walls.

Castle Features

Although castle design varied widely throughout Europe, there were some similar features that many castles incorporated:

Moat - A moat was a defensive ditch dug around the castle. It could be filled with water and there was typically a drawbridge across it to get to the castle gate.

Keep - The keep was a large tower and the last place of defence in a castle.

Curtain Wall - The wall around the castle which had a walkway on it from which defenders could fire arrows down onto attackers.

Arrow Slits - These were slits cut into the walls that allowed archers to shoot arrows at attackers, but remain safe from return fire.

Gatehouse - The gatehouse was built at the gate to help reinforce the castle defences at its weakest point.

Battlements - Battlements were at the tops of castle walls. Generally, they were cut out from walls allowing defenders to attack while still being protected by the wall.

Famous Castles

Windsor Castle - William the Conqueror built this castle after he became ruler of England. Today it is still the primary residence of English royalty.

Tower of London - Was built in 1066. The large White Tower was started in 1078 by William the Conqueror. Over time the tower has served as a prison, treasury, armoury, and royal palace.

Interesting Facts about Castles

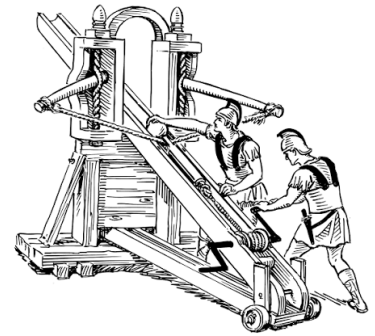
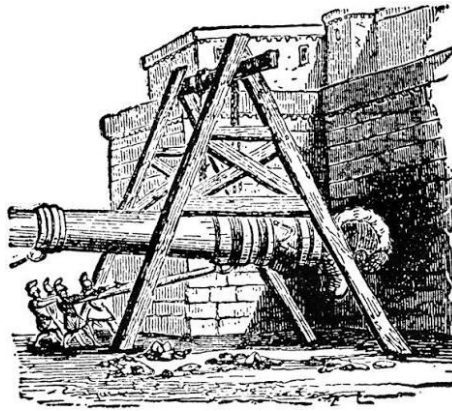
- Originally towers were built with square tops, but later were replaced by round towers that offered better defence and visibility.
- Many castles kept their ale in a room called the buttery.
- Siege engines were used to attack castles. They included the battering ram, catapult, siege towers, and the ballista.
- Often times attacking armies would wait outside and try to starve out the castle dwellers rather than attack them. This is called a siege. Many castles were built on a spring so they would have water during a siege.
- The steward managed all the affairs of the castle.
- Cats and dogs were kept in castles to help kill rats and keep them from eating the grain stores.

Questions

1. Why did Kings and Lords build castles to live in during the Middle Ages?
2. What were the first castles made out of?
3. Why did people stop building castles after the Middle Ages?
4. What defensive feature was a ditch or lake filled with water around the castle?
5. What was the castle keep and what was its purpose?
6. What leader built the Windsor Castle and the Tower of London?
7. What was the title of the person in charge of the affairs of the castle?
8. True or False: Often times attackers would wait outside the castle hoping to force the people inside eventually to come out when they ran out of food.
9. Which of the following was a siege engine that armies would use to attack a castle?

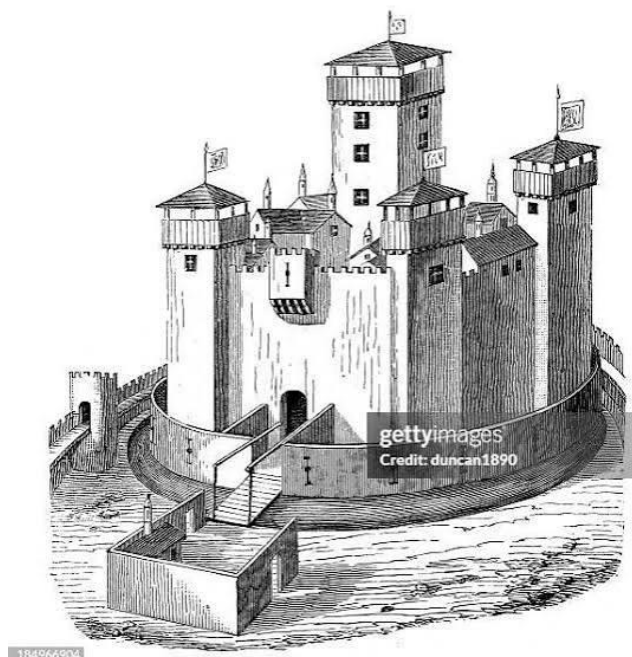
Drawings on the next page: 1. Catapult 2. Battering ram 3. ballista

When finished the questions, check your answers on the next page and give yourself a score.



Answers

1. To protect themselves and their people when attacked
2. Wood
3. Because new weapons such as cannons could easily knock down the walls
4. The moat
5. It was a tower where the people would retreat to as a last defence
6. William the Conqueror
7. Steward
8. TRUE
9. battering ram, catapult, siege towers, and the ballista.



Knights

What was a knight?

Knights were the professional cavalry, who protected the land from enemies. There were three main types of soldiers during the Middle Ages: foot soldiers, archers, and knights. The knights were heavily armoured soldiers who rode on horseback. Only the wealthiest nobles could afford to be a knight. They needed very expensive armour, weapons, and a powerful war horse.

There were two ways that a man could become a knight during the Middle Ages. The first was earning the right on the battlefield. If a soldier fought particularly bravely during a battle or war, he may be awarded knighthood by the king, a lord, or even another knight. The second way was to become an apprentice to a knight and earn the title through hard work and training.

Some knights decided to pledge themselves to defending the Christian faith. They formed orders that fought in the Crusades. The Crusades were a series of wars during the Middle Ages where the Christians of Europe tried to retake control of Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims, (the Ottoman Empire).

The most valuable items to a knight were his armour, weapons, and his war horse. These three items were very expensive, meaning that only the wealthy could afford to be knights. Many knights hoped to regain some of the cost through plunder when they conquered enemy towns and cities.

The following European countries had knights: England, Scotland, France, Hungary, Germany, Italy.

Armour

During the Middle Ages knights wore heavy armour made of metal. There were two main kinds of armour: chain mail and plate armour.

Chain mail was made from thousands of metal rings. The typical chain mail armour was a long cloak called a hauberk. Knights wore a padded cloak underneath the armour to help cushion the weight of the armour. A chain mail hauberk could weigh as much as 13 kg.

Although chain mail was flexible and offered good protection, it could be pierced by an arrow or thin sword. Some knights began to put plates of metal over vital parts of their bodies for added protection. Soon they were completely covered in plate armour and they stopped wearing chain mail.

Knights and nobles in the Middle Ages often had a coat of arms. This was a special symbol that represented their family. Having a special symbol or coat of arms is often called "heraldry".

When not fighting wars, knights needed to hone their skills. One way to do this was through tournaments and jousting. These events were a great way to keep in shape during times of peace.

Tournaments

Tournaments were pretend battles between groups of knights. When a town or area would have a tournament they would invite knights from other areas. Typically the local knights fought against the knights from outside the area.

The battle took place on a large field. On the day of the tournament a large crowd would gather to watch. There would even be stands built where the local nobles could sit to watch. Both sides would parade past the spectators shouting war cries and showing off their armour and coat of arms.

The tournament would begin with each side lining up and preparing for the charge. At the sound of a bugle each side would lower their lances and charge. The knights that were still on their horses after the first charge would turn and charge again. This "turning" is where the name "tournament" or "tourney" comes from. This would continue until one side won.

As you can imagine, tournaments were dangerous. The lances used were blunted so that knights would not be killed, but many were still injured. The best knight from each side was often awarded a prize.

Jousts

Jousting was another very popular competition among knights during the Middle Ages. A joust was where two knights would charge each other and try to knock the other off their horse with a lance. Jousting was the highlight of many games and events. The winners were heroes and often won prize money.



Questions

1. What is the difference between a knight and a foot soldier?
2. What did an archer do?
3. How did a man become a knight?
4. What were the Crusades?
5. What did a knight need to do his job?
6. What was chain mail?
7. What was plate armour?
8. What did a knight's coat of arms represent?
9. What did a knight do when he was not fighting?
10. What was the difference between jousting and a tournament?
11. Which European countries had knights?

Check your answers below and give yourself a score.



Answers

1. Foot soldiers did not have a horse.
2. An archer would fire arrows from a bow.
3. He became a knight by showing bravery on the battlefield or being an apprentice.
4. The Crusades were the journeys to the Holy Land to fight the Muslims who had taken over Jerusalem during the Ottoman Empire.
5. He needed a war horse, armour, a shield and weapons.
6. Chain mail was made from thousands of metal rings.
7. Plate armour consisted of oval plates that were placed over vital body parts.
8. His family unit.
9. When not fighting, he was involved in tournaments or jousting for recreation and practice.
10. Tournaments involved two teams of knights. Jousting was between two knights.
11. England, Scotland, France, Hungary, Germany, Italy.

Daily Life in the Middle Ages

Life in the Country

The majority of people living during the Middle Ages lived in the country and worked as farmers. Usually there was a local lord who lived in a large house called a manor or a castle. Local peasants would work the land for the lord. The peasants were called the lord's "villeins", which was like a servant.

The peasants worked hard all year long. They grew crops such as barley, wheat, and oats. They also had gardens where they grew vegetables and fruits. They also sometimes had a few animals such as chickens for eggs and cows for milk.

Life in the City

City life was very different from country life, but it wasn't much easier. The cities were crowded and dirty. A lot of people worked as craftsmen and were members of a guild. Young boys would serve as apprentices for seven years learning a craft. Other jobs in the city included servants, merchants, bakers, doctors, and lawyers.

What were their homes like?

Although we often think of pictures of large castles when we think of the Middle Ages, most people lived in small one or two room homes. These homes were very crowded and usually everyone slept in the same room. In the country, the family animals, such as a cow, may also live inside the home. The home was usually dark, smoky from the fire, and uncomfortable.

What did they wear?

Most peasants wore plain clothing made from heavy wool to keep them warm during the winter. The wealthy, however, wore much nicer clothes made from fine wool, velvet, and even silk. Men generally wore a tunic, woollen stockings, breeches, and a cloak. Women wore a long skirt called a kirtle, an apron, woollen stockings, and a cloak.

In order to separate the nobles from the peasants, laws were passed called "sumptuary" laws. These laws stated who could wear what types of clothes and what materials they could use.

What did they eat?

Peasants during the Middle Ages did not have a lot of variety in their food. They mostly ate bread and stew. The stew would have beans, dried peas, cabbage, and other vegetables sometimes flavoured with a bit of meat or bones. Other foods like meat, cheese, and eggs were usually saved for special occasions. Since they didn't have a way to keep their meat cold, they would eat it fresh. Leftover meat was smoked or salted to preserve it. The nobles ate a wider variety of food including meats and sweet puddings.

Did they go to school?

Very few people attended school in the Middle Ages. Most peasants learned their job and how to survive from their parents. Some children learned a craft through apprenticeship and the guild system. Wealthy children often learned through tutors. They would go to live in the castle of another lord where they would work for the lord, learning about how a large manor was run.

There were some schools run by the church. Here students would learn to read and write Latin. The first universities also began during the Middle Ages. University students would study a wide range of subjects including reading, writing, logic, math, music, astronomy, and public speaking.

Interesting Facts about Daily Life in the Middle Ages

- The bread eaten by people of the Middle Ages was gritty from the millstones used to grind the grain. This caused the people's teeth to wear down quickly.
- Peasants were not allowed to hunt on the lord's land. Punishment for killing a deer was sometimes death.
- Medicine was very primitive at the time. Sometimes doctors would "bleed" people by putting leeches on their skin.
- People mostly drank ale or wine. The water was bad and would make them sick.
- Marriages were often arranged, especially for nobles. Noble girls often married at 12 years old and boys at 14.

Questions

(Check your answers on the next page and give yourself a score.)

1. What was the most common job for people living in the Middle Ages?
2. Who did most of the peasants work for during the Middle Ages?
3. What word below best describes life in the cities?
4. True or False: Most people during the Middle Ages lived in nice comfortable castles with many rooms.
5. What were sumptuary laws?
6. True or False: People during the Middle Ages ate meat for nearly every meal.
7. What did most people drink during the Middle Ages?
8. What would happen to a peasant who killed a deer on the land of a noble?
9. True or False: Most children, rich or poor, attended school at the monasteries and learned to read and write.
10. What was the main food that peasants ate on a daily basis?

Answers

1. Farmer
2. The local lord
3. Crowded
4. FALSE
5. Laws that said what class of people could wear what types of clothing
6. FALSE
7. Ale or wine
8. He would be punished or even killed
9. FALSE
10. Bread and stew

The Black Death

The Black Death is the name for a terrible disease that spread throughout Europe from 1347 to 1350. There was no cure for the disease and it was highly contagious.

How did it start?

The plague likely started in Asia and travelled westward along the Silk Road. The disease was carried by fleas that lived on rats. Historians think that black rats living on European merchant ships caught the disease, eventually bringing it to Europe.

How bad was it?

It's hard to imagine how scary life was in the Middle Ages during the Black Death. By the time the disease ran its course, it had killed at least one third of the people in Europe and probably more. In Paris, France it's estimated that around 800 people died a day. There were so many dead that they couldn't bury them. They had to carry them to massive pits.

Unfortunately, the people in the Middle Ages didn't know that the disease was carried by rats. This made larger cities and towns, which were very dirty during the Middle Ages, especially dangerous as there were lots of rats there. Sometimes entire towns or villages were wiped out by the plague.

What did the people do?

As you might expect, there was panic. Many people were sure it was the end of the world. People locked their doors and tried to hide in their houses. However, this did little good in cities where rats, and therefore fleas, were everywhere. They also burned down houses and even entire villages to try and stop the disease.

The Bubonic Plague

Today we call this disease the bubonic plague. Very few people get the disease today and most of those that do recover fine. When people got the disease in the Middle Ages, they almost always died. People would get really sick including black and blue blotches all over their body.

Rebuilding After the Black Death

Much of the infrastructure of Europe was gone when the Black Death finally subsided. It's estimated that it took around 150 years for Europe to rebuild.

Facts about the Black Death

- Many people thought that the Black Death was punishment from God.
- It is estimated that somewhere between 75 million and 200 million people died of the plague.
- Some scientists think it was a bacteria called *Yersinia pestis* that caused the disease.
- The plague was not called the Black Death until many years later. Some think it was called this because of how the skin turned dark at the late stages of the disease, but it was more likely called "Black" to reflect the dark and horrible time in history.
- Some people thought that pockets of bad air released by earthquakes caused the plague. Others went so far as to blame Jewish people for bringing the plague to kill Christians.
- The epidemic returned to Europe several times, but wasn't as bad as the Black Death period.

Questions

(Check your answers on the next page and give yourself a score.)

1. What was the Black Death?
2. What animal carried the Black Death and transferred it to humans?
3. Where do historians think that the Black Death started?
4. What did people do when the disease started killing people?
5. What is the Black Death called today?
6. True or false: If you caught the Black Death today you would likely die from it.
7. Around what percentage of people in Europe during the Middle Ages died from the Black Plague?
8. When did the Black Death take place?
9. What did some people at the time think caused the disease?
10. What happened to most of the people who contracted the Black Death in the Middle Ages?

Answers

1. A disease that killed many people in Europe
2. Fleas
3. In Asia
4. They locked their doors and tried to hide in their houses.
5. Bubonic Plague
6. FALSE
7. 33
8. 1347 to 1350
9. Pockets of bad air caused by earthquakes, or Jews bringing it upon Christians.
10. Their skin turned black and then they died

The King's Court

The king's court is a term that describes the king's council and household. The court travelled with the king wherever he went. The king would seek advice from the wise (hopefully) men of his court which would include relatives, barons, lords, and members of the church such as bishops.

The name "court" comes from the fact that most kings held court and made judgments. They would hear certain complaints and issues, especially issues between the most powerful barons and lords. Then they would make decisions with the help of their council.

Visiting His Subjects

The king's court often travelled around the kingdom so the king could see first-hand what was going on in his realm. When the king showed up, the local subjects were expected to provide food, entertainment, and accommodations. This could be very expensive and not all kings were welcome.

How was a king chosen?

Kings came into power a number of different ways. In many cultures, the right to rule was considered part of the king's blood. When a king died, his eldest son would become king. This is called hereditary succession. If the king didn't have an eldest son, then his brother or another male relative may be appointed king. Sometimes kings came into power through assassination or by conquering lands in war.

Of course, no king could rule without the support of his nobles and lords. In many ways, the king was elected by these powerful men. In some countries there was a council that chose the king such as the Witan council in Anglo-Saxon England.

Coronation

New kings were crowned in a special ceremony called a coronation. During the Middle Ages the coronation was a religious ceremony where a leader from the church, such as the pope or a bishop, crowned the king. Kings were often anointed with holy oil to demonstrate their divine right to rule.

Queens

During the Middle Ages, queens were generally not allowed to be the sole monarch. There were a few exceptions including Empress Matilda of England and Isabella I of Spain. However, many queens held power and influence over the land such as Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine and Margaret of Anjou.

How did kings make money?

Some kings were wealthier than others, but all kings needed money to rule. They had to pay for their daily living needs as well as for armies and wars. Kings collected money in a number of ways. One way was to go to war and pillage other lands. Other ways included fees charged to their lords and taxes levied on the people. Some lords paid the king "shield money" instead of going to war. This way the king could hire his own soldiers for war. Kings had to be careful not to overtax the people or the peasants would revolt.

Keeping Power

Once a person was crowned king, they spent a lot of their time trying to stay king. It wasn't that easy. Often times there were close relatives and powerful nobles who felt that they should be king. It was especially difficult to manage large empires because it took so long for messages to travel throughout the kingdom. Kings spent a lot of time making sure that their lords remained loyal and didn't become too powerful.

Interesting Facts about Kings and Court in the Middle Ages

- Taxes were often levied only when the king ran out of money or needed to raise an army for war.
- Many kings during the first part of the Middle Ages couldn't read or write.
- The kings had a special seal they would use to stamp official documents. The seal proved that the document was genuine and acted like the king's signature.
- During the Middle Ages kings were expected to lead their men into battle. In order to maintain control, kings often claimed they were given the right to rule by God. This made the approval of the church and the pope very important. (Medieval Europe was under the Catholic Church.)

Questions

1. Which of the following is NOT true about the court of a medieval king?
2. When a king died, who was usually crowned as the new king?
3. What was the ceremony called where a new king was crowned?
4. True or False: The people always loved it when the king came to visit because he brought presents and fed them.
5. How did the king make money?
6. What was shield money?
7. True or False: Once a person was crowned king, his subjects and nobles always remained loyal.
8. What did kings use to mark their documents and make them official?
9. Why was the backing of the church important to kings?
10. What was the Witan council in Anglo-Saxon England?

Check your answers below and give yourself a score.

Answers

1. The court stayed at the palace, even when the king travelled
2. The eldest son
3. Coronation
4. FALSE
5. Pillaging goods from the lands they were at war with, and collecting taxes from the people.
6. Money the lords paid to kings so they would not have to fight
7. FALSE
8. Seal
9. It said they were given the right to rule by God
10. A council of lords who chose the king

The Catholic Church

Christianity and the Catholic Church played a major role in Europe during the Middle Ages. The local church was the centre of town life. People attended weekly ceremonies. They were married, confirmed, and buried at the church. The church even confirmed kings on their throne giving them the divine right to rule.

Rich and Powerful

The Catholic Church became very rich and powerful during the Middle Ages. People gave the church 1/10th of their earnings in tithes. They also paid the church for various sacraments

such as baptism, marriage, and communion. People also paid penances to the church. The wealthy often gave the church land.

Eventually, the church owned about one third of the land in Western Europe. Because the church was considered independent, they did not have to pay the king any tax for their land. Leaders of the church became rich and powerful. Many nobles became leaders such as abbots or bishops in the church.

Structure of the Church

The leader of the Catholic Church was the pope. Right below the pope were powerful men called cardinals. Next were bishops and abbots. Even bishops held a lot of power on the local level and often served on the council of the king.

Cathedrals

Many churches were built during the Middle Ages. The biggest of these churches were called cathedrals. Cathedrals were where bishops had their headquarters.

Cathedrals were built to inspire awe. They were the most expensive and beautiful buildings built. Sometimes construction on a cathedral could take two hundred years to finish.

Most cathedrals were built in a similar fashion. They generally were laid out in the shape of a cross. They had very tall walls and high ceilings. The style of architecture is called Gothic.

The Reformation

The Middle Ages ended around 1520. Around this time, Martin Luther and John Calvin instigated the Reformation which became the basis for the founding of Protestantism. They spoke out against abuses by the Catholic Church, such as the sale of indulgences (or spiritual privileges) by the clergy and other charges of corruption.

The English Reformation began in England under King Henry VIII when the Church of England broke away first from the authority of the pope and bishops over the King and then from some doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church. These events were part of the wider European Reformation.

Questions

1. How did the Catholic church become so rich?
2. What is evidence of the church's wealth?
3. What did Martin Luter and John Calvin speak out against?
4. What came about as a result?



The Renaissance

The Renaissance was a “rebirth” of learning, art, and science in Europe that started around 1400 and helped people think in new ways.

What Was the Renaissance?

The Renaissance was a special time in European history that began after the Middle Ages, around the year 1400, and lasted until about 1600. The word Renaissance means “rebirth” in French because people rediscovered ideas, books, and knowledge from Ancient Greece and Rome. During this time, people became very interested in learning, art, science, and exploring the world.

Why Did It Happen?

Before the Renaissance, Europe had gone through hard times like the Black Death and famines, which caused many people to die and society to struggle.

Cities in Italy, like Florence, Venice, and Milan, became wealthy, and rich families supported artists, writers, and thinkers. This helped new ideas spread quickly.

Humanism

A big idea of the Renaissance was humanism, which taught that people should study and enjoy life, learn about the world, and develop their talents.

Humanists believed that people could achieve great things and that education was very important. However, with the advent of Humanism came the belief that human beings could do great things without God. The Humanist Society was formed, whose motto is still today “Good without God”.

Famous People

Some famous Renaissance figures include:

Leonardo da Vinci – painter, scientist, inventor, and musician, often called a “Renaissance man” because he was talented in many areas

Francesco Petrarch – a poet who loved reading ancient texts and inspired others to learn

Johannes Gutenberg – invented the printing press, which helped books and ideas spread faster, and coincided with the Reformation, making the Bible accessible to ordinary people. (Previously it was only the church leaders who had access to it.)

Art, Science, and Discovery

During the Renaissance, artists painted more realistically and showed human emotions in their work. (See Leonardo da Vinci’s paintings of *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper* below.)

Architecture flourished. Scientists studied nature, the human body, and the stars. Explorers discovered new lands, which led to the Age of Discovery.

People also started writing in their own languages instead of just Latin, making learning more accessible.

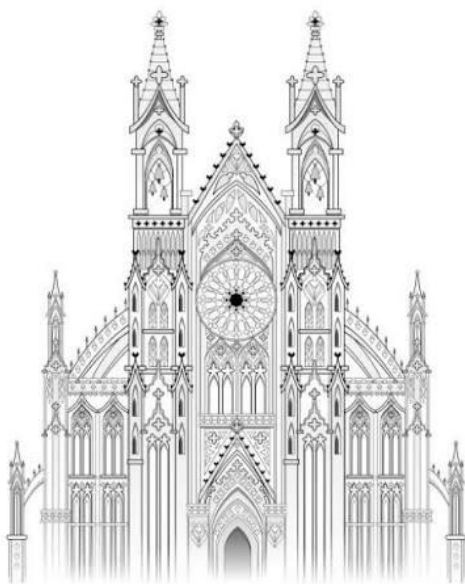
Why the Renaissance Important

The Renaissance helped Europe move from the Middle Ages to the modern world. It encouraged creativity, learning, and curiosity, and it showed that people could think for themselves and explore new ideas.

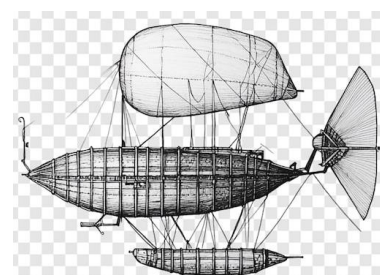
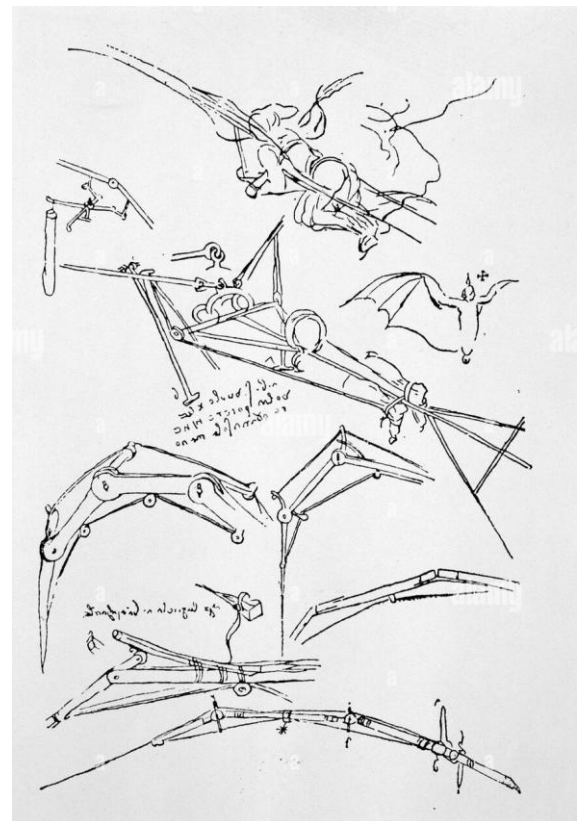
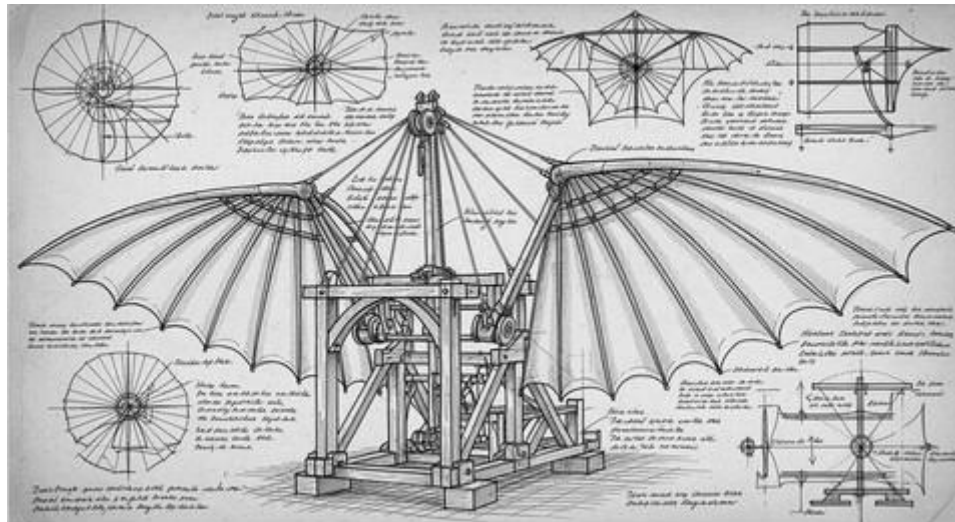
For you to research:

Find more examples of famous paintings and buildings from the Renaissance. Name the artist or designer.

Find out more about Leonardo da Vinci. See pages 48 – 49.



Leonardo da Vinci's drawings: ideas for inventions



Leonardo da Vinci - biography

Leonardo da Vinci was a genius in many fields. He excelled at painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, and engineering. He was a leading figure of the Italian Renaissance, a period of great achievement in the arts and sciences. Leonardo's paintings Mona Lisa and Last Supper won him great fame. But he is also well known for his scientific studies.

Early Life

Leonardo da Vinci was born on April 15, 1452, near Vinci, in Italy. When he was about 15, he began studying with the artist Andrea del Verrocchio in Florence. Verrocchio taught him about painting, sculpture, and the design of mechanical devices.

Paintings and notebooks

Leonardo worked in Milan as a painter and engineer for a duke from 1482 to 1499. He completed only six works in 17 years, but these finished works include The Last Supper and The Virgin of the Rocks. The Last Supper is an immense wall painting in the dining hall of the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Both paintings are widely acknowledged to be artistic masterpieces.

While in Milan, Leonardo also became interested in observing nature. He thought that by carefully observing objects and accurately drawing them, an artist could obtain scientific knowledge. Leonardo recorded his observations in a series of notebooks. The notebooks cover a variety of subjects, including painting, architecture, machinery, the structure of the human body, and the science of flight. For example, more than 300 years before flying machines were perfected, Leonardo developed plans for an airplane and a helicopter.

Later Life

In 1503 Leonardo returned to Florence. There he continued his scientific studies and worked on four great paintings, including the Mona Lisa. He spent some of his later years in Milan and Rome. In 1516 he moved to France, to work for the French king. He spent most of his time there editing his writings. Leonardo died in France on May 2, 1519.

Questions

1. From the drawings on page 48, which of his invention ideas later developed into actual engineering masterpieces that are in use today.
2. In which country was Leonardo born?
3. Name three places in that country where he lived and/or worked. Find these places on a map.
4. Where did he die? Why did he move there from Italy?