



# Time of Change: The Middle Ages

## TERMS & NAMES

medieval  
Charlemagne  
feudalism  
manorialism  
guild  
Magna Carta

### MAIN IDEA

The Middle Ages was a time of great change in Western Europe.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Some developments that occurred during the Middle Ages continue to affect life in Europe today.

## DATELINE

**ROME, A.D. 476**—A Germanic tribe called the Visigoths has attacked our city of Rome and overthrown the emperor, Romulus Augustulus. The Roman army—no longer as large or as well organized as it was during the height of the empire—was unable to fight off the invaders.

After looting the great city, fierce bands of warriors and bandits have continued raiding towns and villages throughout Western Europe. They are stealing jewels and money, killing both people and animals, and even seizing control of entire territories. The Roman Empire seems to have breathed its last breath.



**Region** • Visigoth artifacts, like these saddle buckles, were found near Rome. ▲

## Western Europe in Collapse

As the Roman Empire collapsed in the fifth century, more and more people fled to the countryside to escape invaders from the north and east. Eventually, there was no central government to maintain roads, public buildings, or water systems. Most towns and cities in Western Europe shrank or were totally abandoned. Long-distance travel became unsafe, and trade less common.

### TAKING NOTES

Use your chart to take notes about Western Europe.

Time Period	Social Structure	Architecture
Ancient Greece		
Ancient Rome		



**Reading**  
**Social Studies**

**A. Clarifying**  
Who provided  
leadership during  
the Middle Ages?

**The Beginning of the Medieval Era** The period of history between the fall of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the modern world is called the Middle Ages, or **medieval** (MEE•dee•EE•vuhl) era. During this time, many of the advances and inventions of the ancient world were lost. Without a strong central government, many Europeans turned to military leaders and the Roman Catholic Church for leadership and support.

## Charlemagne and the Christian Church

Among the most famous military leaders was the Germanic King Charlemagne (SHAHR•luh•mayn). In the late 700s, **Charlemagne**, or Charles the Great, worked to bring political order to the northwestern fringes of what had been the Roman Empire. This great warrior not only fought to increase the size of his kingdom, he also worked to improve life for those who lived there.

**A New Roman Emperor** Eventually, news of Charlemagne's accomplishments spread to Rome. Although the old empire was gone, Rome was now the center of the Catholic Church. The Pope recognized that joining forces with Charlemagne might bring greater power to the Church.

In 800, the Pope crowned Charlemagne as the new Holy Roman Emperor. During Charlemagne's rule, education improved, the government became stronger, and Catholicism spread. But after Charlemagne's death, Western Europe was once again without a strong political leader.

## The Role of the Church

Throughout Western Europe in medieval times, each community was centered around a church. The church offered religious services, established orphanages, and helped care for the poor, sick, and elderly. They also hosted feasts, festivals, and other celebrations. As communities grew, their members often donated money and labor to build new and larger churches.

**Monks and Nuns** Some people chose to dedicate their lives to serving God and the Church. These religious people were called monks and nuns. Monks were men who devoted their time to praying, studying, and copying and decorating holy books by hand. Monks lived in communities called monasteries. Many monasteries became important centers of learning in medieval society.



**Region •**  
Charlemagne established order and supported education and culture for a brief period in the early Middle Ages. ▲





**Location •**  
Convents and monasteries often were located in hard-to-reach areas. ▲

Women who served the Church were called nuns. In the Middle Ages, it was common for a woman to become a nun after her husband died. Nuns prayed, sewed, taught young girls, cared for the poor, and also copied and decorated books. They lived in secluded communities called convents.

### Vocabulary

**secluded:**  
to be separate or hidden away

## Two Medieval Systems

During the Middle Ages, almost all the land was owned by powerful nobles—lords, kings, and high church officials. The central government was not very strong. The nobles sometimes even controlled the king and constantly fought among themselves. To protect their lands and position, nobles developed a system known as feudalism.

**The Feudal System** Feudalism was a system of political ties in which the nobles, such as kings, gave out land to less powerful nobles, such as knights. In return for the land, the noble, called a vassal, made a vow to provide various services to the lord. The most important was to furnish his lord with knights, foot soldiers, and arms for battle.

The parcel of land granted to a vassal by his lord was called a fief (feef). The center of the lord's fief was the manor, which consisted of a large house or castle, surrounding farmland, villages, and a church. A fief might also include several other manors or castles belonging to the fief-owner's vassals.

## Connections to History

**The Bayeux Tapestry** This famous work of art depicts the invasion of England by William the Conqueror in 1066. The Bayeux (by-YOO) Tapestry is a series of scenes from the point of view of the invaders, who came from Normandy. Normandy is a part of what is now France. The work is an important source of information about not only the conquest of England, but also medieval armor, clothing, and other aspects of culture.

Although called a tapestry, the work is really an embroidered strip of linen about 230 feet long. It includes captions in Latin. The Bayeux Tapestry was probably made by nuns in England about 1092.







**Manorialism** On the manor, peasants lived and farmed, but they usually did not own the land they lived on. In exchange for their lord's protection, the peasants contributed their labor and a certain amount of the food they raised. Some peasants, known as serfs, actually belonged to the fief on which they lived. They were not slaves, but they were not free to leave the land without the permission of the lord. This system, in which the lord received food and work in exchange for his protection, is known as **manorialism**.

**Place** • Although castles were large, they were built for defense. Castles were usually located on high ground with a series of walls and towers. ▲

## Medieval Ways of Life

Medieval nobles had more power than the peasants. However, the difference in the standard of living between the very rich and the very poor was not as great as the difference today.

**Castle Life** The manor houses or castles may have been large, but they were built more for defense than for comfort. Thick stone walls and few windows made the rooms cold, damp, and dark. Fires added warmth but made the air smoky. Medieval noble families may have slept on feather mattresses, but lice and other pests were a constant annoyance. Most castles did not have indoor plumbing.





**Peasant Life** Peasants lived outside the castle walls in small dwellings, often with dirt floors and straw roofs. They owned little furniture and slept on straw mattresses. It was common for peasant families to keep their farm animals inside their homes.

Peasants often worked two or three days a week for their lord, harvesting crops and repairing roads and bridges. The rest of the week they farmed their own small plots. Many days were religious festivals during which no one worked.

## Connections to Economics

**The Middle Class** In the early Middle Ages, only a small percentage of people in Western Europe were wealthy landowners. Most people worked on manor lands or at some sort of craft. However, those workers who found jobs in towns often were able to save money and build businesses. Eventually, their improved status led to the rise of a middle class.

Unlike nobles, the members of this new middle class did not live off the land they owned. They had to continuously earn money, as most people do today.

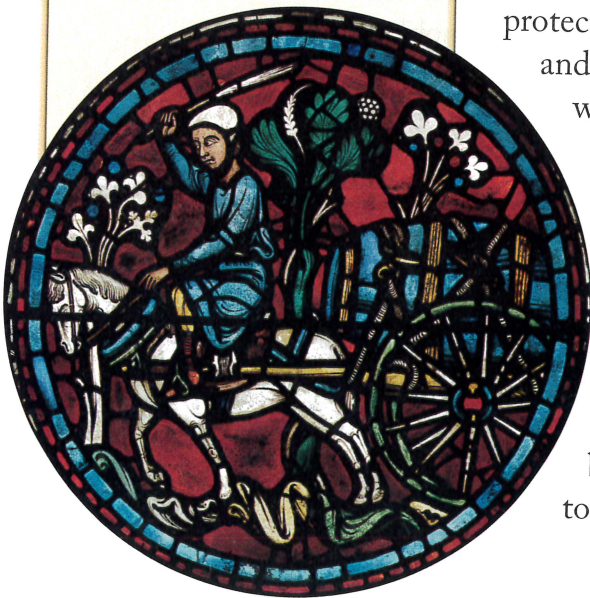
## The Growth of Medieval Towns

By the middle of the 11th century, life was improving for many people in Western Europe. New farming methods increased the supply of food and shortened the time it took to harvest crops. Fewer farmers were needed, and workers began to leave the countryside in search of other opportunities. People moved back into towns or formed new ones that grew into booming centers of trade. The population increased, and more and more people owned property or started businesses.

**Guilds** As competition among local businesspeople grew, tradespeople and craftspeople created their own guilds, or business associations. Similar to modern trade unions, a **guild** protected workers' rights, set wages and prices, and settled disputes. Membership in a guild was also a common requirement for citizens who sought one of the few elective public offices.

### Reading Social Studies

**B. Analyzing Motives** Why did people create guilds?



## The Late Middle Ages

Over time, the towns of the late Middle Ages grew in size, power, and wealth. The citizens of these towns began to establish local governments and to elect leaders.



**Governments Challenge the Church** The Pope insisted that he had supreme authority over all the Christian lands. Kings and other government leaders, however, did not agree that the Pope was more powerful than they were. This is an issue that continues to be discussed today.

**Region •** High taxes and failures on the battlefield made King John one of the most hated kings of England. ▼

**The Magna Carta** The rulers of Western Europe also struggled for power with members of the nobility. In England, nobles rebelled against King John. In 1215, the nobles forced the English king to sign a document called the **Magna Carta** (MAG-nuh KAHR-tuh), or Great Charter. This document limited the king's power and gave the nobles a larger role in the government.



**Region •** The Magna Carta influenced the creators of the U.S. Constitution. ▲



## SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

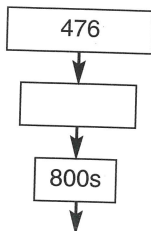
### Terms & Names

1. Explain the significance of:

- |                 |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| (a) medieval    | (b) Charlemagne | (c) feudalism   |
| (d) manorialism | (e) guild       | (f) Magna Carta |

### Using Graphics

2. Use a flow chart like this one to show how Europe changed over four time periods: A.D. 476, the 800s, the mid-1000s, and the 1200s.



### Main Ideas

3. (a) Why is this era of European history called the Middle Ages?  
 (b) Describe the role of the Church in medieval society.  
 (c) How did manorialism help both nobles and peasants?

### Critical Thinking

#### 4. Contrasting

How did life differ for nobles and peasants under feudalism?

#### Think About

- ♦ where they lived
- ♦ what they ate
- ♦ how they did their work

### ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Review the information about serfs. Write a series of short **journal entries** describing what a week in the life of a serf might have been like during the Middle Ages.