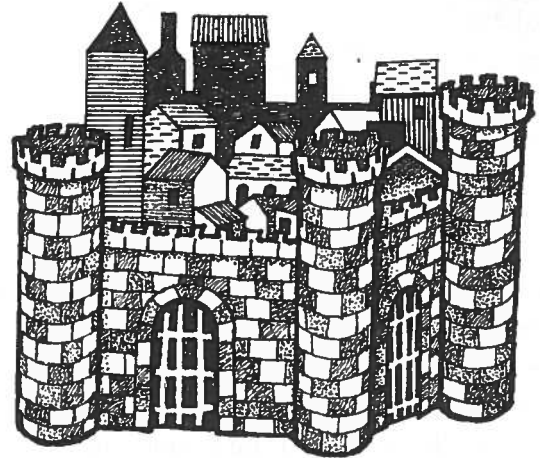


Creating the Middle Ages

Before you read any further, write in the blanks below the first images that come to mind when you hear the term *Middle Ages*.



In the study of Western Civilization, historians have typically relied on three primary time frames. These divisions of Western history help the historian and the student of history understand how Western Civilization has developed in stages. The three time frames are generally referred to as the Ancient World, the Middle Ages, and the Modern Era.

The Ancient World spans the development of civilization through Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. With the fall of the Roman Empire around A.D. 500, historians begin looking at a new stage in the advancement of Western Civilization: an era called the Middle Ages.

Historians created the term Middle Ages to identify a long period of European history from the fall of Rome to the rise of a new era, the Modern World, which begins around 1500. The word *middle* is used to identify an era which lies between two others—one ancient, the other modern.

The Middle Ages are also known as the medieval period. The term comes from two Latin words: *medium*, meaning “middle,” and *aevum*, meaning “age.” From their beginning to their end, the Middle Ages comprise a thousand years of European history. Many changes come to Europe during these centuries.

With the rise of the medieval world, the center of the western world continues to move further west. During the Ancient period, the center of the western civilized world was the Near East (known as the Middle East today), a region which included Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, Persia, and other places.

With the rise of the Greeks, the center of the civilized world shifted to the west to the region of the

Mediterranean Sea. As the Romans became more dominant over the western world, civilization shifted to the north, further into Europe, as the Roman Empire spread into Gaul, Britain, Spain, and the region of the Germanic tribes. Thus, the history of the Middle Ages marks the shift from not only the ancient world to the medieval world, but a geographic shift from the Mediterranean further north across the European continent.

Much change came to Western Civilization during the Middle Ages. In fact, so much change occurred that historians divide the Middle Ages into three categories of time:

The Early Middle Ages—500 to 1000

The High Middle Ages—1000 to 1300

The Late Middle Ages—1300 to 1500

In each of these three eras of European medieval history, important changes occurred. The world of Europe in the year 1500 was very different from the experiences of Europeans in A.D. 500.

By the close of the Middle Ages, great kings ruled over powerful states such as France and England; Columbus discovered the New World for Europe; the Portuguese sailed around Africa and reached the East; and the invention of gunpowder rendered medieval castles and knights outdated.

In this book, we will be looking at the world of the Europeans during the Early and High Middle Ages. During these centuries, Western Civilization made great strides toward our time, helping to create the modern world in which we live.