

Medieval Europe Comprehension

Beginning and Ending

The Medieval period lasted approximately 1000 years, commencing around 500 CE (shortly after the fall of the Roman Empire) and concluding around 1500 CE when the Renaissance occurred. Significant societal change occurred as a result all throughout Europe.

Different Names

There are a variety of terms used to refer to the Medieval period, including the 'Middle Ages' or even the 'Dark Ages'. Medieval scholars who preferred to dub it as the 'Dark Ages' tended to be quite biased in favour of Ancient Rome, viewing the Medieval period as a time of disastrous cultural and intellectual decline. These academics harkened for a return to Roman culture, society and prosperity and saw their own society as shameful and ignorant.



Impressive Architecture

However, circumstances were not quite as bleak as these scholars might have had us believe. Medieval Europe ushered in some of the most breathtaking architecture - particularly, in the form of impressive cathedrals. Catholicism inspired strong devotion all throughout Europe with monarchs seeking to honour their religion through beautiful buildings.

Romanesque

Throughout the eleventh century, Romanesque style architecture flourished. Incredibly sturdy and solidly built walls, towering archways, tiny windows and impressively tall structures were just some of the key features of Romanesque architecture. One famous Romanesque style structure built during the Medieval period was Pisa Cathedral. Construction of this immense building began around 1063.



Gothic

By the twelfth century, Romanesque architecture decreased in popularity and a new style - Gothic architecture - began to take precedence. In contrast to rounded Romanesque arches, Gothic structures had pointed archways, flying buttresses and tended to have more elaborate decorations. Construction began on Cologne Cathedral in Germany in 1248 and occurred in several stages, with the impressive structure finally being completed in 1880. It is a fantastic example of Gothic architecture.



Crusades

The physical remains of these cathedrals are a strong reminder of the piety of Europeans during this period. This religious fervour reached a boiling point in 1095 CE when Pope Urban II called upon all Christians to partake in a crusade to recapture the holy land (Jerusalem) and return it to Christian control. He promised indulgences to all who partook, meaning their sins would be forgiven and their slate wiped clean. This sermon set off a series of different religious crusades whereby people gave their lives in the name of their faith. Some crusaders were trained soldiers; however, others were unskilled and lured into battle under promises including indulgences, the chance to loot or the opportunity to gain land.



Farming

Despite this religious turmoil, the Medieval period also saw times of stability where new farming techniques were invented and honed. The heavy plough was introduced throughout Europe, enabling farmers to turn-over and till thick soil. New horse collars were also invented, allowing heavy-set work-horses to breathe easier when tied to ploughs. Previously, the harnesses used had restricted the respiration of these animals and made it very difficult for them to work for extended periods of time.



Inventions and Advancements

Medieval Europe was a time shaped by several remarkable inventions and advancements. The printing press had its origins in China; however, by the 15th Century, a man called Johannes Gutenberg invented a portable version that changed the entire world, making the mass production of books possible for the first time. This meant information could be shared with the masses in a much faster manner, leading to the spread of new ideas which sparked rapid changes to society, religion and culture. Vision-correcting glasses were another advancement during this time, with some of the first pairs developed in Italy. These are only two of the ways in which Medieval Europe shaped the world.



Wars

Unfortunately, despite the many positive developments, the Medieval years were also marred by warfare. There were a range of different wars taking place throughout this period. Notably, in 1066, England was the site of the Battle of Hastings, which saw conflict between the Normans and the Saxons. Additionally, The Hundred Years War between Britain and France (14-15th Century) was also very significant. Finally, England also suffered from civil strife in the form of The Wars of the Roses, which began in 1455. These conflicts were named posthumously due to each family using a different rose as a crest (white for York and red for Plantagenet). Violence, bloodshed and betrayal ensued as the Plantagenet and York noble families in England fought each other for the crown.



Plague

Another major issue during the Medieval period was the spread of the plague. The Black Death was a virulent strain of bubonic plague, leaving sufferers covered in swollen lymph nodes known as buboes, killing most people who contracted it within one week. It was believed to have arrived on European shores around 1347 and outbreaks were fairly regular from this point. Doctors patrolled the streets dressed in long-beaked masks in the attempt to protect themselves from this pestilence. Estimates suggest that approximately 25 million people succumbed to this deadly disease.



Overall, the Medieval period was a dynamic one, ushering in new architecture, religious zeal, farming inventions and other societal advancements. Nonetheless, religious fanaticism and warfare blighted these years, dampening the prosperity being ushered in by the positive products of this age.

Comprehension Questions

Answer the following questions by writing full sentences in your History book.

1. Identify when the Medieval period commenced.
2. Identify which period preceded the Medieval period.
3. Identify which period came after the Medieval period.
4. Identify one other name for the Medieval period.
5. Identify some features of Romanesque architecture.
6. Identify some features of Gothic architecture.
7. Explain the promise made by Pope Urban II.
8. Explain what events occurred as a result of the Pope's promise.
9. Explain one development which made farming easier during the Medieval period.
10. Identify who invented the first portable printing press and explain its impact on the world.
11. Identify who fought in the Battle of Hastings.
12. Identify the conflict which saw the Plantagenet and York families fight for supremacy.
13. Describe the Black Death.
14. Identify how many people died from the plague during the Medieval period.
15. Summarise what you learned about the Medieval period from this worksheet by writing a paragraph.