

Section

2

The Middle Ages

Read to Discover

1. What were the Middle Ages?
2. What was society like during the Middle Ages?
3. How did the Middle Ages come to an end?

Define

feudalism	manors	middle
nobles	serfs	class
fief	clergy	vernacular
vassals	cathedrals	
knight	Crusades	
chivalry		

Locate

France	Jerusalem
England	Spain
Normandy	
Norway	
Denmark	
Sweden	

WHY IT MATTERS

The desire to control Jerusalem, which led to the Crusades, is still a cause of conflict. Use CNNfyi.com or other **current events** sources to learn what is happening in Jerusalem today. Record your findings in your journal.



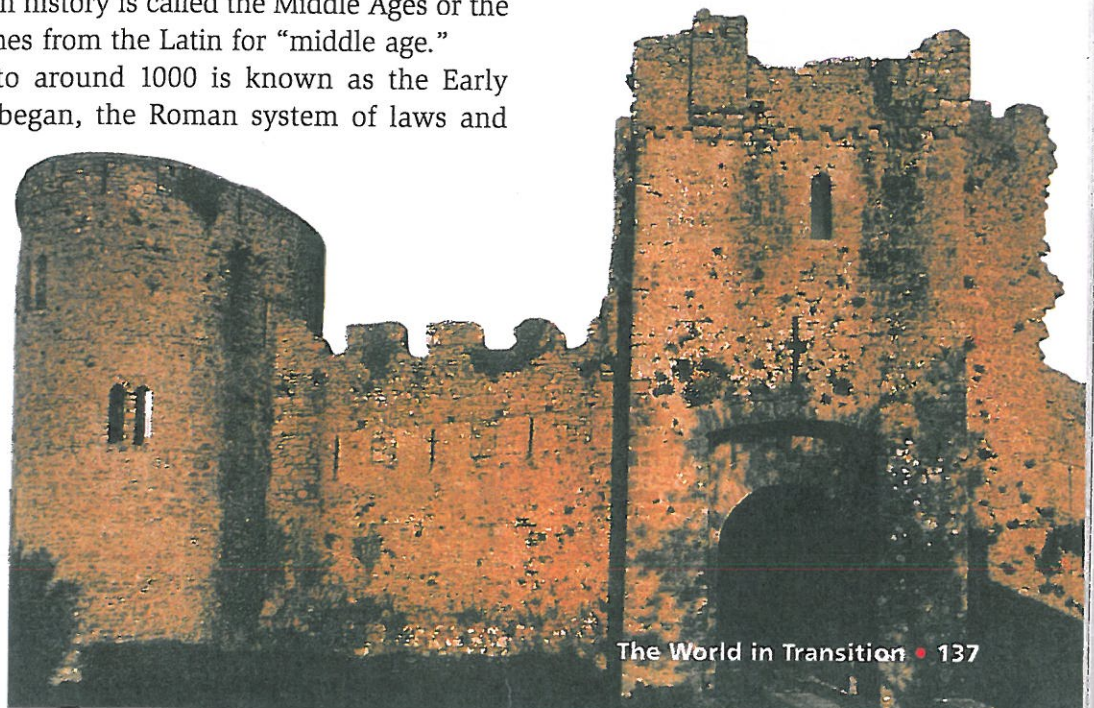
A medieval knight

The Rise of the Middle Ages

In the year A.D. 476, the last of the western Roman emperors was defeated by invading Germanic tribes. These invaders from the north brought new ideas and traditions that gradually developed into new ways of life for people in Europe. Historians see the years between the last of the Roman emperors and the beginnings of the modern world in about 1500 as a period of change. Because it falls between the ancient and modern worlds, this time in history is called the Middle Ages or the medieval period. *Medieval* comes from the Latin for “middle age.”

The time from the 400s to around 1000 is known as the Early Middle Ages. As this period began, the Roman system of laws and government had broken down. Western Europe was in a state of disorder. It was divided into many kingdoms ruled by kings who had little authority. For example, Britain was largely controlled by two Germanic tribes, the Angles and the Saxons. These groups had established several independent kingdoms.

Nobles in the Middle Ages built their own castles for protection.





▲ Charlemagne (742-814) united most of the Christian lands in western Europe. He built libraries and supported the collection and copying of Roman books. His rule became a model for later kings in medieval Europe.

Interpreting the Visual Record

What qualities made Charlemagne a good king?

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Between A.D. 600 and 1000, many people invaded western Europe.

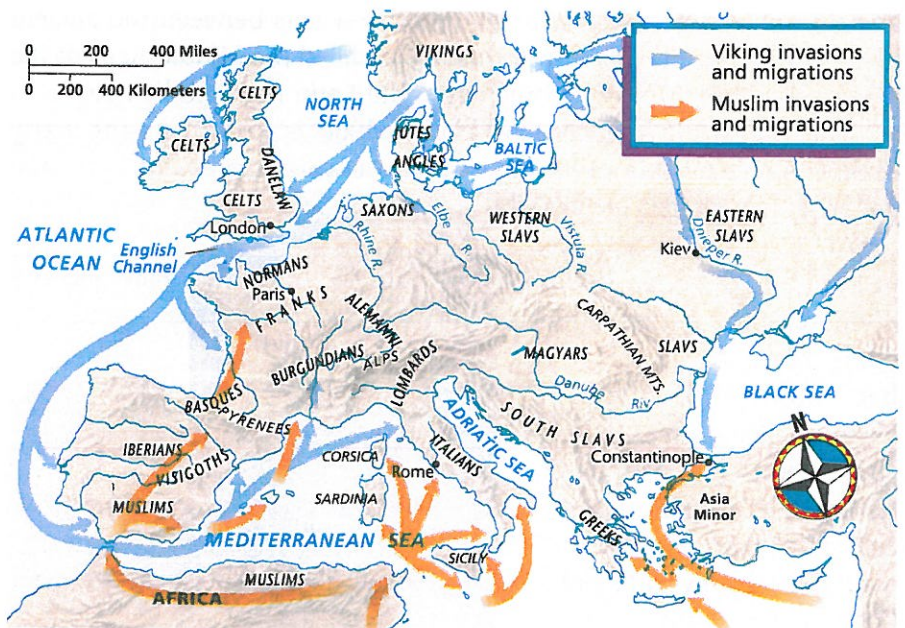
Interpreting the Map What group of invaders were most active in the Mediterranean area?

The Franks The Franks were one of the Germanic tribes that moved into western Europe. In the 490s, Clovis, the king of the Frankish tribes, became a Christian and gained the support of the church. He conquered other Frankish tribes and won control of the territory of Gaul. Today this area is called France after the Franks. In 732 a Frankish army under King Charles Martel held off an army of Spanish Moors who had invaded his kingdom. This conflict is called the Battle of Tours. This defeat drove the Muslim Moors back into Spain, creating a border between the Christian and Muslim worlds.

The greatest Frankish king, Charlemagne (SHAR-luh-mayn), ruled from 768 to 814. A strong, smart leader, Charlemagne established schools and encouraged people to learn to read and write. His greatest accomplishment was to unite most of western Europe under his rule. Charlemagne's empire included most of the old Roman Empire plus some new additional territory. It later became known as the Holy Roman Empire because the pope declared Charlemagne "Emperor of the Romans."

After Charlemagne died, his grandsons weakened the empire by dividing it among themselves. Muslims invaded from the south. Slavs invaded from the east. From the north came the dreaded Vikings.

The Vikings During the 800s and 900s the Vikings were feared throughout western Europe. They came from what are now the countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The Vikings were not only farmers but also skilled sailors and fierce warriors who raided towns along the coasts of Europe. Eventually these invaders settled in England, Ireland, and other parts of Europe. A large Viking settlement in northwestern France gave that region its name. It is called Normandy, from the French word for "Northmen." The Vikings there came to be known as the Normans.



Life in the Middle Ages

Feudalism Within 100 years of Charlemagne's death, the organized central government he had put in place was gone. By the 900s most of Europe was governed by local leaders under a system known as **feudalism**. It was a way of organizing and governing people based on land and service. In most feudal societies, the king, who owned all the land in his kingdom, granted some lands to **nobles**—people who were born into wealthy, powerful families. The grant of land was called a **fief**. Nobles had complete power over their land—power to collect taxes, enforce laws, and maintain armies. In return for land, they became **vassals** of the king. This means that they promised to serve the king, especially in battle. A noble could, in turn, grant fiefs to lesser nobles. In so doing, that noble would become a lord, and the lesser nobles would become his vassals. A vassal owed service—especially military service—to his lord.

Feudalism was a very complex system. Its rules varied from kingdom to kingdom. Feudal relationships in France, for example, were not the same as those in Germany. The relationships between kings and nobles in England were very different from those in either France or Germany. In addition, the nature of feudal relationships were constantly changing. Laws that governed a king's or a vassal's behavior one year might not apply just a few years later. It was sometimes very difficult, even during the Middle Ages, for people to keep track of their feudal obligations.

Nevertheless, powerful lords were the ruling class in Europe for more than 400 years. Some lords were so powerful that the king remained on the throne only with their support. Over time it became the custom that the owner of a fief would pass his land on to his son. By about 1100 the custom was that the eldest son inherited his father's land. Women had few rights when it came to owning property. If a woman who owned land married, her husband gained control of her land.

Knights The most common type of nobleman was the **knight**, or warrior, who received land from a lord in return for military service. Knights lived by a code of behavior called **chivalry**. This code said that a knight had to be brave, fight fairly, be loyal, and keep his word. He had to treat defeated enemies with respect and be polite to women. In battle, a knight wore heavy metal armor and a metal helmet. He carried a sword, a shield, a lance, and other weapons. Knights had plenty of opportunities to fight. In addition to large-scale wars that occurred during the Middle Ages, frequent smaller battles took place between lords who tried to seize each other's lands.



This stained-glass window shows a lord and his vassals.

Interpreting the Visual Record

What details in the picture show that the lord is more powerful than the vassals?



To become a knight, a boy usually had to come from a noble family. Boys began their training at the age of seven.

Interpreting the Visual Record How do the knights in this picture look, and how do you think they feel?



▲ This picture, made during the 1400s, shows peasants at work during a harvest.

Interpreting the Visual Record What do you think farming was like in the Middle Ages?

The Manorial System Trade declined after the end of the Roman Empire. Most people took up farming for a living. The large farm estates which some nobles developed were called **manors**. Such manors included large houses, farmed lands, wooded land, pastures, fields, and villages. The lord of a manor ruled over peasants called **serfs** who lived on his land. Serfs were poor and had no rights. They had to work the lord's land and give him part of their crops. They could not leave the manor without the lord's permission. A manor was usually self-sufficient. Almost everything people needed, including food and clothing, was produced right there.

The Church One of the largest and wealthiest landowners during the Middle Ages was the Catholic Church. Headed by the pope, the church was enormously powerful, with its own laws and courts.

Officials of the church were known as the **clergy**. Beneath the pope were bishops and priests. Other members of the clergy were monks, who lived in monasteries, and nuns, who lived in convents. While most ordinary people could not read or write, many members of the clergy were educated. In monasteries, monks prayed, studied, and copied ancient books.

Eventually, huge churches, called **cathedrals**, were built. Cathedrals cost a great deal of money and were beautifully decorated. Some of the most common decorations were elaborate stained-glass windows.

The Crusades In the late 1000s, the pope asked the lords of Europe to join in a great war against the Turks, who had gained control of Palestine, which the Christians called the Holy Land. This war turned into a long series of battles called the **Crusades**. The First Crusade lasted from 1095 to 1099. Crusaders captured Jerusalem and killed many of the Muslims and Jews who lived there. However, over the next 100 years, the Turks won back the land they had lost. Three more major Crusades were launched. Although the Holy Land was not recaptured, the Crusades led to important changes in Europe.

✓ **READING CHECK: Summarizing** How did feudalism make the nobles and their vassals depend on each other?

▲ Knights in the Middle Ages often fought from horseback.

