

Medieval Europe

An overview of a thousand years of history: 400 to 1450 CE

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Section 1: One Unit, Two Resources

This Premium TimeMaps Unit is based on a **sequence of maps** showing the history of Medieval Europe between the fall of the Roman (400 CE) to the period of the Italian Renaissance (1450 CE).

This sequence is presented in **two resources**, a slide show and a series of map pages, so that teachers can choose **two approaches** to covering the topic with your students: a whole-class presentation; and individual project work, for which the institution will need a multiuser licence so that the students can access the resources for themselves.

1. Slide show

The slide show is primarily designed for use as a whole-class presentation. Commentary notes are available as an *aide memoir* for the teacher when delivering the presentation. They provide talking points on each map in the slide show.

The slide show can also be used by the students in their project work. A students' commentary is also provided.

2. Timemaps map pages

These are designed specifically for use by students in their project work.

Each map shows Medieval Europe at a particular date. The maps are accompanied by information about what is happening at that date.

This combination of map and information makes it easy for students to use the map pages, though not so ideal for teachers to use as a class presentation (hence the slideshow, see above).

Section 2: Using the Resources

The unit can be used in one of two ways:

1. Whole-class presentation

The **slide show** is specifically designed for teachers to use as a whole class presentation, offering a visual, panoramic overview of the topic. It can be used as an introduction to the topic, or as a wrap up, or as a stand-alone resource.

A **commentary** is provided to help teachers cover the key points for each slide.

In Section 3 Task 1 (below), are a series of questions (they are also found at the end of the commentary), which can be answered by a single word or short phrase. The questions aim to reinforce the learning outcomes from the presentation, and can be used as a test or reinforcement exercise at the end of the presentation.

Another way might be to print the questions out and give them to the students, and ask the students to note down the answers as the slide show progresses. They can either submit their answers for marking, or collaborate in small groups to come up with an agreed set of answers.

2. Student-based enquiry work

Students use the maps, plus linked information, to find out for themselves about the topic. In the process, they gain knowledge and understanding of the topic, whilst at the same time developing analytical and other thinking skills.

Students can use either **map pages** or **slide show**. In the map pages, the linked information is right next to the maps; in the slide show, it is in the **student commentary**.

In either case the institution will need a multiuser licence.

Both slide show and map pages are built around the same series of maps, following the history of Medieval Europe between 400 CE and 1450 CE.

Simple forward/back navigation buttons (and in the map pages, a timeline below the maps) make it easy to move through the map sequence.

To start the sequence of map pages, click on the map dated **400 BCE**.

To start the slide show, click **HERE**.

Teachers may wish to combine the whole-class presentation approach with the student-based approach - for examples, see Section 4.

Section 3: Activities

This section offers some suggestions for using this Premium Unit with your students. The following section (Section 4) offers some ways in which the suggested tasks can be used within a lesson.

Students can do the activities as individuals or in small groups. They will obviously need to have direct access to this Premium TimeMap unit, for which a multi-user licence is required.

Task 1. Questions

These questions can be used with the slide show (see above; hence they also appear at the end of the [slide show commentary](#)). They can also be used in the context of student-based enquiry work, as a simple way to reinforce knowledge of the topic. If so, in place of whole class presentation, students access the slide show or map pages directly to answer the questions.

The answers are given (*in Italics*).

1. What was the official religion of the Late Roman Empire? (*Christianity*)
2. What great city was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire? (*Constantinople*)
3. Which figure did the Christian church in western Europe look to for spiritual leadership? (*The Bishop of Rome, or Pope*)
4. Which country in western Europe was occupied by Muslim Arabs in the early 8th century CE? (*Spain*)
5. What great Frankish king conquered a large part of western Europe and was crowned emperor in 800 CE? (*Charlemagne*)
6. Which people from northern Europe began raiding the coasts of Britain and other countries at the end of the 8th century? (*the Vikings, Norse, Northmen, Scandinavians - all these labels will do*)
7. What is the large state in eastern Europe which has been created by Viking settlers and traders? (*Rus*)
8. What large state in central Europe was founded in 962 CE? (*The Holy Roman Empire*)
9. What was the label which Europeans used to describe the family of nations which made up Europe? (*Christendom*)
10. The anarchy of the 9th and 10th centuries gave rise to a distinct social-political structure in western Europe - what was this called? (*Feudalism*)
11. The Church in Europe was divided into two main branches - name one of these? (*The Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church*)
12. Who was the leading figure in the Christian church in western Europe? (*The pope, or bishop of Rome*)
13. What is the name given to an area of northern France originally granted to a Viking leader and his followers? (*Normandy*)

14. Which country do the Normans, under their duke William, invade in 1066? (*England*)
15. Name one the wealthy trading cities of northern Italy (*Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Florence, or Milan*)
16. By what name are a series of religiously inspired campaigns known, whose aim was to capture Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims? (*The Crusades*)
17. What was the agreement called which was made between king John of England and his nobles in 1215? (*Magna Carta*)
18. What people from central Asia conquered Russia and devastated central Europe in the mid-13th century? (*The Mongols - but allow Golden Horde*)
19. What government institution makes its appearance in England in the late 13th century? (*Parliament*)
20. By what name is the long series of wars in Spain between Christians and Muslims known? (*The Reconquista*)
21. What is the name given to the pandemic which swept Europe in the mid-14th century? (*The Black Death*)
22. By what name is the long struggle between England and France in the 14th and 15th centuries known? (*The Hundred Years' War*)
23. What was the Muslim sultanate which started conquering Byzantine territory and grew powerful in the Balkans in the 14th and 15th centuries? (*The Ottoman sultanate*)
24. What was the cultural movement which emerged in Italy in the 14th and 15th centuries? (*The Renaissance, or Italian Renaissance*)

Task 2. Critical thinking questions

The aim of these activities is to develop analytical thinking skills, and in particular getting students to grapple with history-specific issues such as cause and consequence, and change and continuity.

General Instructions:

1. Students read the questions below, which either they or their teacher has chosen.
2. They then go through the map sequence or slideshow (in the latter case they will have to have access to a copy of the student commentary).
3. As they do this, they carefully take notes, focusing on the questions they are answering. They should bear in mind when and where events or developments happen; why they happen; and what changes as a result of them happening.
4. Students use their notes to prepare their answers. These can be in either essay form or as presentations.

(*Note to teacher: suggested answers are given in italics and brackets*)

Question 1:

Create a timeline of the key episodes in Medieval European history.

Note that this task involves not only identifying the key issues, but also organizing them chronologically. This may not be straightforward, as some developments take place over long periods of time and overlap chronologically with other ones.

(The episodes I would include would be the ones below; students may select different ones - but they have to be prepared to give reasons.)

- *Fall of Roman Empire in the west*
- *The Muslim conquests*
- *The rise of Charlemagne's empire*
- *Viking, Magyar and Arab raids*
- *The Expansion of Christendom into central, northern and eastern Europe*
- *The rise of Feudalism*
- *The Great Schism and the split between Eastern and Western Christendom*
- *The Reconquista in Spain*
- *The Investiture Crisis and the broader tensions between church and state in western Europe*
- *The Crusades*
- *The Magna Carta in England*
- *The rise of Parliament in England*
- *The Black Death*
- *The Italian Renaissance - which would revolutionize thought and culture in western civilization*
- *European exploration - which would lead to the modern, global, system of nations we know today.)*

Then ask the question: What were the four or five most important of these? Give reasons for your choice. Feel free to group connected developments into one answer.

(This is quite a difficult one. Personally, I might choose

1. *the Fall of the Roman empire, as this set the stage for all that followed;*
2. *the Muslim conquests, as this led to the shrinkage of European trade in the Mediterranean, the cutting-off of influences from the east for several centuries, and ultimately the Crusades and all that flowed from those;*
3. *the Viking and Magyar raids, as these caused immense chaos in western Europe and stimulated the rise of feudalism;*
4. *The Magna Carta and rise of Parliament in England, and these would eventually lead to the rise of democracy in the West;*
5. *The Black Death, as this profound shock had impacts on many aspects of European society and culture (including religion).*

Students may choose differently. For example the rise and break-up of Charlemagne's empire certainly had a huge impact, and the Great Schism between the Western and eastern Churches divided and weakened Christendom.)

Question 2:

Different groups of students track the histories of the following countries or regions in the Medieval period:

- The Roman/Byzantine Empire

(The survival of the Eastern Roman Empire - the Slav and Islamic Conquests - Bulgars; The Battle of Manzikert - the Fourth Crusade and its aftermath - the Rise of the Ottoman Sultanate)

- Italy

(Southern Italy: Byzantines, Lombards, Normans - Central Italy: decline of the city of Rome, the Papacy, Franks, the Papal States - Northern Italy: economic growth, independence from the Holy Roman Empire, the Renaissance)

- France

(Franks, Charlemagne, West Franks - Vikings, anarchy, feudalism - the 100 Years' War)

- The British Isles

(Saxons etc. - Christianization - The Norman conquest - Magna Carta and Parliament - Wales, Ireland, Scotland - the Black Death - decline of serfdom - the 100 Years' War)

- Germany and central Europe

(Franks, Charlemagne - Magyars - Holy Roman Empire - decentralization of power away from the emperors: papal interference, civil war - The Golden Bull - The rise of the Hapsburgs)

- Scandinavia and the Baltic

(Conversion to Christianity - the Orders of Knights in the Baltic - the rise of Poland-Lithuania)

- Russia

(Grand Principality of Kiev - conversion to Christianity - fragmentation - the Mongols/the Golden Horde - the rise of Muscovy)

- Spain

(The Visigoths - The Muslim conquest - the Reconquista - the emergence of Castile and Aragon as the two leading kingdoms)

They present their findings to the class.

The groups then jot down those developments which are part of a broader European episode.

A whole-class discussion might then focus on which of the episodes and trends mentioned are of significance to the whole of Europe - and perhaps the world.

(On the evidence of this unit, coupled with some intelligent thinking, students might include the following:

- *trends in population and trade, and their impact on society and culture;*
- *the expansion of Christianity, and also divisions within it;*
- *political developments, for example in England, which saw the early enshrinement of human rights (Magna Carta) and the emergence of parliamentary government;*
- *the Black Death and the decline of serfdom (paving the way for freer societies);*
- *religious disquiet in the aftermath of the Black Death, which would prepare the ground for the Reformation and the more secular culture of the modern West;*
- *the development of gunpowder, leading to modern warfare and all that that has brought... and others?)*

Question 3:

Trace the history of feudalism in western and central Europe, and account for its rise and decline.

(Answers should include the anarchy of the 9th and 10th centuries, the rise of knights and castles, the rise of "Chivalry"; and in terms of its decline, the rise of professional armies, and the impact of the longbow, pike and gunpowder on the decline of mounted knights in battle - any more?)

Question 4:

Answer the question, What were the most important trends and developments in this period of European history?

(Ignore those which make their first appearance in 1450, as these belong more properly to the next period.)

You could divide this question up, so that one group takes developments within the Church, another looks at society and economics, another at learning and culture, another at government and warfare.

- *within the Christian Church - the spread of Christianity, the Schism between Catholic and Orthodox Europe; the power of the papacy, and its claims to superiority over secular rulers leading to tensions with the secular rulers, the Black Death leading to religious disquiet*
- *within society and economics - population and economic growth; the rise and decline of Feudalism; the Black Death and later plagues leading to the decline of serfdom; renewed economic growth and urbanization.*
- *within learning and culture - decline of Classical civilisation after the fall of the Roman Empire, and its preservation by Christian monks; the impact of the Crusades and other contacts with Arabic civilization; the rise of independent city-states in northern Italy and their patronage of art and learning, eventually leading to the Renaissance (which opened the door to the modern era).*
- *within government, politics and warfare - partial survival of Roman law and government under "Barbarian" rulers; the rise of feudalism; the investiture Controversy; political fragmentation in Germany, centralization in France; self-governing city republics in northern Italy; decline of feudalism; Magna Carta and parliament in England.*
Warfare - feudal armies with knights; decline of knights due to long bows, pikes, gunpowder weapons.

If there is time, identify developments and trends which cut across the different strands.

In class, discuss what were the most crucial influences on European history at this time. Come up with a list of two or three.

My answers might be:

- *the Christian Church and the papacy;*
- *demographic and economic trends, including the Black Death;*
- *contacts with Asian civilization.*

A whole-class discussion can then focus on which of the episodes and trends mentioned are of significance to the whole of Europe - and perhaps the world.

Students may struggle with this without knowing what came next in European and World history - for example, what seem like developments of fairly local significance in this period in fact helped to shape nations such as England, France, Germany, Spain and Russia which, in the modern period, were to have a huge impact on the entire world.

On the evidence of this unit, however, coupled with some intelligent thinking, students might like to consider that profound long-term consequences would emerge from the emergence of prosperous and independent cities in northern Italy, which paved the way for the Renaissance, and

political developments in England, which saw the early enshrinement of human rights (Magna Carta) and the emergence of parliament.

Section 4: Plans of Action

Here in this section are possible strategies, plans of action you might like to follow (or adapt as you see fit) for using some of these activities.

Plan A:

This plan combines the presentation approach with the student-centered enquiry approach. Do this if you are doing this topic as a major topic with the class.

1. Introduce the topic by presenting the slide show to the class. Use the teacher's commentary as a guide.

2. The students complete Task 2 by answering one or more of the questions given there.

They use either the map pages or the slide show (plus student commentary) to answer the question(s).

They can do this task as individuals, for their own project work. Alternatively, they can do it in small groups.

All the students or groups can be asked to do the same questions, or all to do different ones.

3. The students then write up and submit their work in essay form for marking, or prepare a presentation for showing to the class.

Plan B:

This plan will take less time than Plan A to complete.

1. Show the slide show to the class, using the teachers' commentary as a guide. Tell the students that there will be a test at the end.

2. Ask the questions in Section 3, 1, above, to the class as a whole, with the students calling out the answers (if they remember any!).

Give out the questions on printed sheets (for this, use the questions as given at the end of the students' commentary). Show the class the slide show again. This time they take notes in preparation for the same test again.

T3. The students write their answers on this sheet and submit for marking.

Plan C:

This should take longer than Plan B to complete, but not as long as Plan A.

1. The students are handed copies of the questions in Task 1 (or use the questions as given at the end of the students' commentary).

2. The students work their way through the map pages or the slide show (if the latter, using the students' commentary), and as they do so they note down the answers to the questions.

3. The teacher then shows the slide show to the class as a whole, using the teachers commentary as a guide. In the course of this presentation they will give the students the answers to the questions.

Section 5: Further Reading

A list of all TimeMaps articles can be found on the Encyclopedia home page. Here is a selected list of key articles which students should find helpful for Medieval Europe.

[The Later Roman Empire](#)

[The Byzantine Empire](#)

[Medieval Europe - Overview](#)

[Medieval Europe - The Church](#)

[Medieval Europe - Economy](#)

[Medieval Europe - Feudalism](#)

[Medieval Europe - Government and warfare](#)

[The Islamic Caliphate](#)

[The Ottoman empire](#)

[The Mongol empire](#)

[Imperial Russia](#)

[Early Modern Europe](#)