

INTO THE WORLD OF MEDIEVAL EUROPE

You probably know something of the world of medieval Europe from films which are set in this period of time, such as *Rabin Hood*, *Braveheart*, *Jackie*, *First Knight*, and *Merlin*. Films like these help take us back to a time and a world very different from our own. They show a world peopled with knights in shining armour, ladies in distress, travelling minstrels, executioners, kings, monks and peasants. These films can show us what it was like to live in a castle, how uncomfortable life could be without the conveniences we are used to and how hard it was for many people to receive justice. We can see both the beauty and the hardships of life at this time in history.

Some of what films show us is both entertaining and accurate, some is fantasy. This chapter will help you understand more about the realities of life in medieval Europe and its importance to our own world.

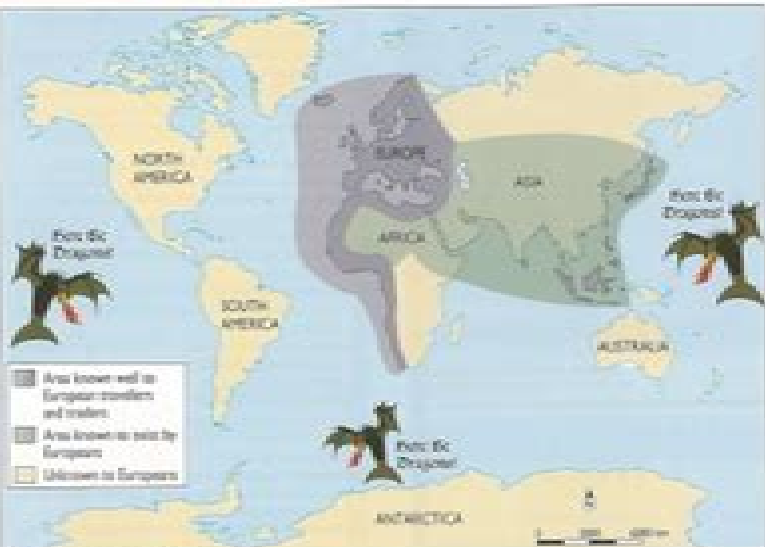
Source 7.1.1

Source 7.1.1



Illustrations by film-makers create the medieval world in their films.

The introduction on the previous page explains the terms 'medieval' and 'medieval Europe'. The timeline on the previous page and the following map will make this information clearer.



The world known to medieval Europeans

BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES

Historians often use the term Dark Ages to indicate the destruction and breakdown which followed the end of the Roman Empire. This term is not really accurate because during this time (c. AD 500 to c. 1000) there were many achievements that were far from dark. For example, the Frankish leader Charlemagne (c. AD 768–c. 814) created law and order throughout his empire. He encouraged learning and the revival and protection of Roman knowledge.

The world of medieval Europe was a pre-industrial, largely agricultural world, controlled mainly by small groups dominated by men. Leaders and priests taught people to accept their position in life. This meant acceptance of a world in which they had few rights and little freedom.

Medieval Europeans lived in a world of superstition and thought that witches caused problems such as illness, plague, drought, famine and crop failure. Most people believed that the Earth was flat and that if they travelled too far they would fall off the edge or meet up with weird creatures that were half-human and half-animal. The majority of medieval Europeans believed the Catholic Church's teaching that the Earth was the centre of the universe and that the sun, planets and stars revolved around it.

Life was short and difficult. People died young, not only because of lack of medical knowledge and effective treatments, but also because the medieval era was a time of constant warfare.

CULTURAL LEGACY

The medieval world is important in its own right and not just because it came between two other important periods of time. It is important because of the contributions its people made to the cultural heritage of the world we live in. We can still see our medieval heritage in the great cathedrals

and castles that dominate the European landscape today, in the towers which still have walls around them, narrow, crooked and cobbled streets, medieval market places and guild halls. The cultural heritage of the medieval world is evident in the tapestries, paintings, literature and illuminated manuscripts that our world has inherited from it. In Sydney, there are signs of the influence of medieval architecture in buildings like the Great Hall at Sydney University, St John's Cathedral in George Street and St Mary's Cathedral in College Street.

The medieval world is also important because many of the institutions which are a significant part of our life today had their beginnings in this period of time. These include banks, cities, parliaments, universities and our court system.

Activities

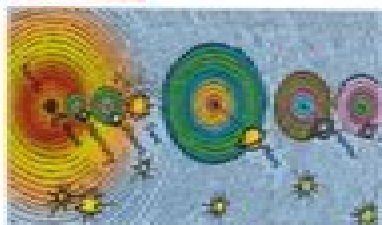
Using sources

1. What do film-makers need to think about to accurately re-create the medieval world? In source 7.1.1, what have they done to re-create the impression of another time?
2. When do you think the term 'medieval' was first used about AD 500, AD 1000 or after AD 1400? Use the text and the timeline on pages 154–5 to give reasons for your answer.
3. Use source 7.1.2 to name the following:
 - (a) the areas of the world which were known well to medieval Europeans
 - (b) other areas they were aware of
 - (c) areas which were unknown to them.
4. Which medieval ideas does source 7.1.3 illustrate?

Researching and communicating

Work in pairs or small groups to do further research on medieval ideas about the world. You could look for information on ideas about religion, science, geography, medicine, women, education and so on. Summarise your findings in a poster for display on the class noticeboard.

Source 7.1.3



Sketches by a modern artist showing some medieval ideas about the world



World History Textbook Chapter 21

Christopher Wordsworth



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