

Medieval Europe

AD 300-1400

300-500 A.D. The Germanic Migrations in Europe:

- 306-337: Constantine -- Byzantine Empire begins
- 312: Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity
The Edict of Milan grants legal rights to Christians
- 325: The Council of Nicea
- 361-363: Julian the Apostate
- 372: Attila the Hun defeats the Visigoths
- 378: Battle of Adrianople
- 379-395: Emperor Theodosius
- 406: Thousands of Germans cross the Rhine into the

Roman Empire

- 410: Rome is sacked by the Visigoths
- 354-430: St. Augustine of Hippo
- 455: Rome is sacked by the Vandals.
- 476: Romulus Augustulus, the last Roman emperor in

the West is deposed.

500-1000 A.D. Early Middle Ages [Dark Ages]: The Beginnings of Germanic Europe

- c. 450: Anglo-Saxons invade England.
- 481-511: Clovis, King of the Franks.
- 484: Gundobad proclaims the Burgundian Code
- 565-750: Christianization of Britain:
597: Saint Augustine begins his missionary work
in England.
- c. 735: Bede writes *History of the English Church and People*.
- 711-715: Moslem conquest of Spain.
732: Battle of Tours
756-1031: Omayyad Dynasty of Cordova
c. 1126-1198: ibn Rushd (Averroes)
- 768-814: Reign of Charlemagne
777: Charlemagne invades Spain.

800: Charlemagne is crowned emperor,
temporarily reviving the Roman Empire in the West.

- 843: Treaty of Verdun divides Charlemagne's empire.
- 800-900: Viking raids against European mainland
- 871-899: Alfred the Great of England
- 936-973: Otto I (the Great)
 - 955: Battle of Lechfield
 - 962: Otto is crowned emperor, reviving the

Roman Empire in the West.

1000-1350 A.D. High Middle Ages

- 936: Otto the Great begins consolidation of the Holy Roman Empire
- 1066: The Battle of Hastings
- 1164-1216: Reign of King John of England
 - 1215: Magna Carta is presented to King John
- 1079-1144: Peter Abelard
- 1095-1291: The Crusading Era
- 1222-1242: The Mongol Invasion of Europe
- 1225-1274: St. Thomas Aquinas

1350-1500 A.D. Late Middle Ages

- 1337-1453: Hundred Years War
- 1347-1351: The Black Death
- 1378-1415: The Great Schism
- 1453: Fall of Constantinople

The Keepers of Knowledge

How knowledge and learning survived in the middle ages

They began as "men alone," solitary ascetics in wattle huts in the desert, living off berries and nuts, contemplating the nature of God, and praying for their own salvation. It wasn't long before others joined them, living nearby for comfort and safety, if not for conviviality. Individuals of wisdom and experience, like Saint Anthony, taught the way to spiritual harmony to the monks who sat at their feet. Rules were then established by holy men like Saint Benedict to govern what had become, in spite of their first intentions, a community. Monasteries, abbeys, priories--all were built to house men or women who sought spiritual peace.

For the sake of their souls, people came there to live a life of strict religious observance, self-sacrifice, and work that would help their fellow human beings. Towns and sometimes even cities grew up around them, and the brothers or sisters would serve the secular community in a variety of ways -- growing grain, making wine, raising sheep -- usually remaining separate and apart. Monks and nuns played many roles, but perhaps the most significant and far-reaching role was that of the keepers of knowledge.

It was very early in its collective history that the monastery of Western Europe became the repository for manuscripts. Part of the Rule of Saint Benedict charged its followers to read holy writings every day. While knights underwent special education that prepared them for the battlefield and the court, and artisans learned their craft from their masters, the contemplative life of a monk provided the perfect setting in which to learn to read and write, and to acquire and copy manuscripts whenever the opportunity arose. A reverence for books and for the knowledge they contained was not surprising in monastics, who turned their creative energies not only into writing books of their own but into making the manuscripts they created beautiful works of art. Books may have been acquired, but they were not necessarily hoarded. Monasteries could make money charging by the page to copy out manuscripts for sale. A book of hours would be made expressly for the layman; one penny per page would be considered a fair price. It was not unknown for a monastery to simply sell part of its library for operating funds. Yet books were prized among the most precious of treasures. Whenever a monastic community would come under attack -- usually from raiders like the Danes or Magyars but sometimes from their very own secular rulers -- the monks would, if they had time, take what treasures they could carry into hiding in the forest or other remote area until the danger had passed. Always, manuscripts would be among such treasures. Although theology and spirituality dominated a monastic's life, by no means were all of the books collected in the library religious. Histories and biographies, epic poetry, science and mathematics -- all of them were collected, and studied, in the monastery. One might be more likely to find a bible, hymnals and graduals, a lectionary or a missal; but a secular history was also important to the seeker of knowledge. And thus was the monastery not only a repository of knowledge, but a distributor of it, as well.

Monastic teachers and students

Until the twelfth century, when Viking raids ceased to be an expected part of everyday life, almost all scholarship took place inside the monastery. Occasionally a high-born lord would learn letters from his mother, but mostly it was the monks who taught the oblates -- monks-to-be -- in the tradition of the classics. Using first a stylus on wax and later, when their command of their letters had improved, a quill and ink on parchment, young boys learned grammar, rhetoric and logic. When they had mastered these subjects they moved on to arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. Latin was the only language used during instruction. Discipline was strict, but not necessarily severe.

Teachers did not always confine themselves to the knowledge taught and retaught for centuries past. There were definite improvements in mathematics and astronomy from several

sources, and methods of teaching were not as dry as one might expect: in the tenth century a renowned monastic used practical demonstrations whenever possible.

Not all young men were suited to the monastic life, and though at first most were forced into the mold, eventually some of the monasteries maintained a school outside their cloisters for young men not destined for the cloth. As time passed these secular schools grew larger and more common and evolved into universities. Though still supported by the Church, they were no longer part of the monastic world. With the advent of the printing press, monks were no longer needed to transcribe manuscripts. Slowly, monastics relinquished this part of their world, as well, and returned to the purpose for which they had originally congregated: the quest for spiritual peace.

But their role as the keepers of knowledge lasted a thousand years, making the Renaissance and the birth of the modern age possible. Scholars (and Western civilization) will forever be in their debt.

Medieval Schools & Universities Education

There were many different kinds of schools in medieval England, though few children received their sometimes dubious benefit. There were small, informal schools held in the parish church, song schools at cathedrals, almonry schools attached to monasteries, chantry schools, guild schools, preparatory grammar schools, and full grammar schools. The curriculum of these schools was limited to basics such as learning the alphabet, psalters, and religious rites and lessons such as the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins. The grammar schools added to this Latin grammar, composition, and translation.

Schools

In addition to the schools listed above there were also privately endowed schools like Winchester and Eton. The most famous public school, Eton, was founded by Henry VI in 1440. The term "public school" can be misleading. It refers to the fact that the school drew its students from all over the country rather than just the local area.

School Life

Most schools had no books and the students were taught by rote and the skill of individual masters. Most masters were minor clergy, who themselves were often indifferently educated. Classes at some of the larger schools could be as large as 100 or more boys (no girls, though they were accepted at some of the small local schools), and the school day lasted as long as 13 hours with breaks for meals. And to top it off students could expect to be beaten regularly with a birch rod.

Universities

Oxford University grew out of efforts begun by King Alfred to encourage education and establish schools throughout his territory. There may have been a grammar school there in the 9th century. The University as we know it actually began in the 12th century as gatherings of students around popular masters. The university consisted of people, not buildings. The buildings came later as a recognition of something that already existed. Cambridge University was founded by students fleeing from Oxford after one of the many episodes of violence between the university and the town of Oxford.

Students

University students chose their own course of studies, hired their own professors, and picked their own hours of study. They were free to leave a professor if they tired of him, and join another, attending several lectures before deciding whether to pay him or not. The only books were the professors, and students wrote notes on parchment or, more commonly, on wax tablets.