

AS THE WORLD TURNS: 450-1300 CE

Review

If the story of the world were broken down into eras, or long and distinct periods of history that share a particular feature/characteristic, the Ancient World era was long and transformational in every imaginable way. Beginning around 8,000 BC at the beginning of the Agricultural Revolution, the human race made massive advancements in every imaginable area:

- Food sources went from hunting and gathering to massive farms that could feed millions of people.
- Societies developed from nomadic tribes to city-states to kingdoms to multi-continent empires.
- Religion grew from tribal deities to help with the hunt, to complex religious systems followed by millions of people with massive temples, religious sites, rituals, written texts, artwork, and spiritual power structures.
- Governments transformed from the heads of families who spoke directly to their relatives to men who were worshiped as gods by nations who had written, codified laws that were obeyed by millions.
- Architecture improved from basic mud/straw huts to massive structures that seemed to scrape the floor of paradise.
- Materials to make goods improved from wood, stone and bone to the creation of metals like copper, bronze and iron.
- Art evolved from hand prints on caves to metal statues towering 300+ feet tall.
- Communication and trade went from neighborhood gatherings to networks that extended over three continents.
- The world's population grew to the size of 250 million people.

Few eras of human history lasted longer or saw greater changes.

Going Medieval

Between 200-400 CE, the Ancient World Era came to a sudden and unexpected halt. Within a relatively short window of time, the advanced empires in Europe (Rome), China (Han) and India (Gupta) collapsed. People moved from complex cities back out into the wilderness. Important chunks of knowledge were inexplicably lost. Culture regressed. Life expectancy shortened. The world's population dropped by 50 million people. It was as though time was going backwards as humanity drastically regressed in many portions of the globe. These changes marked the beginning of a new era is called the Medieval Era; running from around 400 CE to 1300 CE.

Medieval means old fashioned or primitive. It is during this era where the world goes through a metamorphosis, distinctively remaking itself and laying the foundations upon which modern societies we are familiar with will eventually be built.

This reading will explore the Medieval Era, breaking the history down into distinct regions of the world, following important trends and developments.



Europe - Part 1: Barbarians & Chaos

The transitional event that marks the end of the Ancient Era and the start of the Medieval Era is the collapse of the western half of the Roman Empire to the German Barbarians. To understand this transition, a question must be answered: Who were these German Barbarians?

- They were polytheistic animists (nature worshipers) who lived in small clan villages of 7-10 families.
- Wealth and power was displayed by land and animal ownership.
- The clans pledged allegiance to a leader or chief. The chief fights for victory, the clans fight for the chief. Chief rewards clans with land and riches.
- The Germans liked to fight, rest and feast. They were warriors and partiers.
- Many cities built walls around their city to ensure that the Barbarians stayed out.

The Germans and Romans had a love-hate relationship. Some tribes loved and idolized the Romans. They wanted to be Romans and were hired by Rome to be mercenaries (paid soldiers). Others hated Rome and the pain and suffering brought by warfare and expansion. They also hated how Romans treated the Germans, as though they were less than human.

In 450 CE, what caused these Germans to migrate into Western Europe and sack Rome? The short answer: Attila the Hun.

Attila the Huns: The Scourge of God.

The Huns were a group of nomadic horsemen out of the Steppes of Central Asia. The Steppe was a dry, flat area with harsh winters and little vegetation. Thus, the Huns were harsh and ruthless like their homeland. The Huns prided themselves on looking scary, even to the point of scarring and deforming their children to grow up to be scary warriors. Their skill on horseback and with archery allowed them to move with great speed and bring massive destruction. The Huns did not want to rule. The Huns wanted gold and destruction.

The Huns rapidly moved and conquered from the edge of China (thank you Great Wall) westward towards Europe. People had two choices: move or die. Thus, tribes in Germany could either move into Western Rome or face Attila. Finding Rome to be weak and lazy, and since 80% of Rome's army was made up of barbarians, the Germans migrated/invaded Rome.



Attila's reign of terror over the Eastern and Western Roman empires ended on his wedding night, when he died from choking on a nose bleed when he was asleep. His "empire" quickly dissolved, but the impact of his rule was just beginning to be felt...

The Early Middle Ages (490-900 CE).

The German tribes that fled from Attila quickly conquered large areas of Europe. The Visigoths (now in Spain) and Vandals (N. Africa) hated Rome and lived only to pillage and kill. The Franks (France) and Ostrogoths (Italy) tried to imitate Rome. They even gave themselves Roman titles... but did not have the education or ability to keep the Roman system running. People in large numbers migrated away from the cities into the country side seeking food, shelter and protection. It was a total breakdown on political, economic, and social levels. The 50,000 miles of Roman Roads, which had once allowed for easy travel and trade, were now avoided at all cost for fear of being killed. Added to this mix was an outbreak of smallpox. It was brutal anarchy throughout much of Europe.



The organization that kept the torch of Roman culture burning was the Christian Church. Once persecuted by the Roman Government, Christianity became the official and mandatory religion of Rome in 380 CE. If you did not convert or believe the right doctrines you would be charged with heresy (having a belief that contradicts the Christian Church) and face severe punishment. This also opened the door to people flooding into Christianity to try to gain more political power for themselves.

By the time Rome fell, there were churches or monasteries in every major city and small village throughout the empire. The churches stepped in to provide order, social services, agriculture and Latin education now that the society had collapsed. They even had copies of the Roman Law and helped to put the law back into place with their new German leaders. The Pope, the head of the Catholic Church who resided in Rome, now had great political and social power along with his religious standing.

Charlemagne. Charlemagne had a dream of unifying all of the Germanic tribes, reclaiming all of the old Roman Empire, and making converts to Christianity. From 768-816 he conquered much land in France, Italy, and Germany. Charlemagne also promoted art and education, creating the start of a cultural revival in Europe. In 800, Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope. Unfortunately, his empire would get divided after his death, with one part becoming France and the other the "Holy Roman Empire."



Byzantine Empire

When the city of Rome fell, only half of the empire fell with it. The Caesars were still alive and well, living in prosperity... in the Eastern half of the Empire. Historians call the eastern half the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantines were the gatekeepers connecting Europe to the Middle East and Asia. Because of their prime location, they were a center for trade and were immensely rich. They were the place of knowledge. The Byzantines had all of the old Greek & Roman knowledge, but also access to the latest advances from the Muslims and India. They also built magnificent buildings like the Hagia Sophia church.



In 527, Justinian the Great was Caesar of the Byzantines. During Justinian's reign, two major events happened:

-*Justinian Code*. The code unified and simplified all of the Roman rules and laws, explaining how governments, individuals and nations should behave.

-*The Great Schism*. The Christian church in Western Europe had strong disagreements with the church in the Byzantine Empire over the Bible, leadership, rituals and artwork. Since the two sides could not compromise, they split into: The Roman Catholic Church (Holy City: Rome) and the Eastern Orthodox Church (Holy City: Constantinople).

ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Read & Update the Content Matrix
- 2) Fill out this chart with the the strengths/positives and weaknesses/negatives of each region.

Region	Strengths	Weaknesses
Europe		

- 3) Create an impact chart. As you read you are to evaluate each area on the level of impact the people in that region had on the world culturally, militarily, and economically.
 - Rate each area as to how impactful you believe them to be at the at 300 CE (■) and at 1300 CE (▲).
 - Draw arrows to show whether they grew or shrunk in impact and influence.
 - If there is change, ask yourself "What caused them to grow or shrink or stagnate in their influence?" and make note of it on your chart.

How to rate each region:

- Local: Mainly Hunter/Gatherers and Small Villages; people barely impacting those outside of their small circles.
- Regional: Kingdoms, Small Empires.
- Continental: Large empire(s) that span across/impact/consume most of the continent.
- Inter-Continental: Massive empire(s) that span across/impact/consume multiple continents.
- Global: Massive empire(s) that span across/impact/consume most of the world.

Examples

