

Introduction to the Medieval Era

'Eras'

Historians divide up the past into different periods or eras. 'History' really begins when people started to write things down (in contrast to the period of 'pre-history'). In general, the history of Europe has three different periods: **Ancient** or **Classical** (roughly the Greeks and the Romans), **Medieval**, and **Modern**.

Medieval literally means the 'Middle Ages' – the period between Ancient and Modern. Roughly, the period starts with the fall of the Roman Empire (the 5th century) and ends with the beginning of the Renaissance (about the 15th century).

As well as being known as the medieval period and the Middle Ages, the early part of this era is also called the **Dark Ages**. The Dark Ages are the time between the fall of the Roman Empire and the appearance of writing in languages other than Latin. People thought the period was 'Dark' because it seemed to be a time of little development compared to the periods before and after it. Few historians use this term now because it is rather negative.

Dating

Dates before the birth of Jesus Christ are called **BC** (Before Christ) or **BCE** (Before Common Era). After this moment the dates are **AD** (Latin for 'in the year of the lord') or **CE** (Common Era).

A **century** is 100 years. When we talk about a date in history we use the number of the century after or before the birth of Jesus Christ. The first century AD lasted from the first year to 99, the second from 100 to 199, and so on. Because of this system, the year 1650 does not fall in the 16th century (as you might expect), but in the seventeenth century.

Often we are not sure exactly what date something happened, but we can work out roughly when it happened. To show this we put the letter **c.** in front of the date which means **circa** (Latin for 'about').

Medieval Europe

During the medieval period, kings in Europe became very powerful and kingdoms grew larger by conquering other kingdoms. The Christian Church was very rich and influential, and people started to trade all over Europe using money.

Medieval Scotland

The medieval period is when Scotland became one kingdom that covered all of the land of today's Scotland. Before this Scotland was not united under one king, but instead there were smaller kingdoms, such as Galloway and Moray.

England was always the biggest threat to Scotland's independence because it was the closest neighbour and it was a very powerful kingdom. The Wars of Independence was a very important time for Scotland to make sure it remained its own kingdom separate from England.