

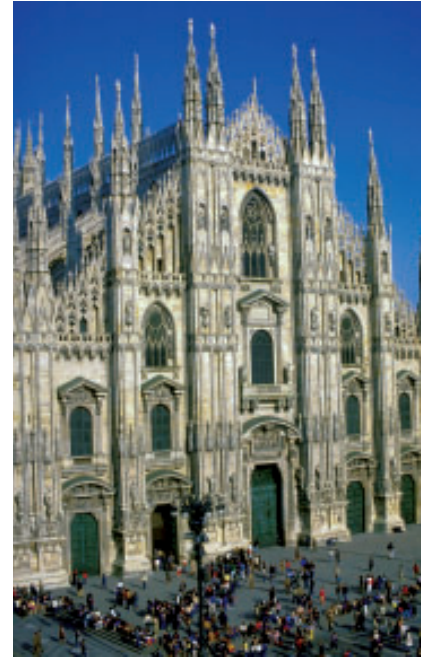
## How Did the Renaissance Begin?

At the beginning of the 1300s, Europe was still very much a society of the Middle Ages. But change was slowly beginning to occur. Contact with other cultures was increasing and the exchange of ideas was spurring change. By the end of the 1300s, in Italy especially, change was happening more rapidly and society was moving into a new period, later called the Renaissance.

To better understand the past, historians assign specific titles or labels to certain eras. For example, the time span in western Europe between 1350 and 1600 is referred to as the Renaissance. The period of time before the Renaissance and after the downfall of the western Roman Empire is referred to as the Middle Ages or the Medieval Period, since it is in the middle or in between two major historical times in Europe, stretching from the 4th century to the 14th century.

During the Middle Ages, most Christian Europeans shared a religious worldview that God was the centre of human existence. The beliefs of the poor presented a worldview in which they accepted a harsh, short life on Earth, believing they would be rewarded after death by going to heaven. Wealthier people also lived life with religion as the central point of their beliefs. They looked to the afterlife and donated money and property to the Roman Catholic Church, hoping that God would reward them with heaven.

The art and architecture of the Middle Ages were influenced by religion because almost every European thinker and artist worked for the Church. Rarely did anyone disagree with the Church's ideas about the world or the way people should lead their lives. No one questioned the importance of religion. Church officials were seen as God's chosen representatives. The head of the Church, the pope, was a powerful man, ruling both the Roman Catholic Church and the wealthy papal state, with Rome at its centre. He had a major influence on kings and their kingdoms, as well as on people's beliefs and actions. There were often power struggles between the pope and the monarchs.



Milan Cathedral, Italy, constructed 1386 to 1418. The importance of religion to life in the Middle Ages and Renaissance is shown by the grandeur of European cathedrals.

*I wonder ... what do buildings and structures show about the historical periods when they were built?*

In times past, historians often referred to the time period of the Middle Ages as the Dark Ages in Europe. Thinking has changed. Historians now recognize that since Europe had divided into many small states, developments were occurring at the local level rather than on the grand scale of empires such as the Roman Empire. At the same time, though, large civilizations flourished in other parts of the world: Chinese, Mongol, and Indian cultures in Asia, Songhai and other cultures in Africa, Islamic cultures in Asia, Africa, and parts of Europe, and Mayan and Aztec cultures in Mexico and Central America.

Examine the map of Europe, which was drawn in 1335, during the Middle Ages. Opicinus de Canistris, the mapmaker, used both human figures and non-human figures to represent different parts of Europe. What does this map show about how people of this time period viewed the world?

### Opicinus de Canistris Map of Europe



## The Crusades

During the late Middle Ages, armies from Europe organized **crusades** to try to recapture areas of the Middle East that were under Muslim control. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all considered these areas holy because that is where their religions had their roots. **Judaism**, **Christianity**, and **Islam** all grew out of the same religious history. Each group at the time wanted control of the area. Christians believed that control of the Holy Land should be in Christian hands.

History shows that the Christian control of the Holy Land was short-lived. However, the results for Europe were huge. Entire armies travelling through the Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire, and meeting up with the Islamic world, were exposed to a way of life very different from their own. Thousands of religious **pilgrims** — men, women, and children — also visited the holy sites and met different societies. Europeans became more aware of other cultures. They encountered new ideas and knowledge, as well as new foods, spices, cloth, and other exotic goods. Travellers returned to their homes with new ideas and attitudes that led to new ways of thinking about their own lives and their own societies.

**crusade:** a campaign in favour of a cause; historically, a medieval Christian military expedition to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims

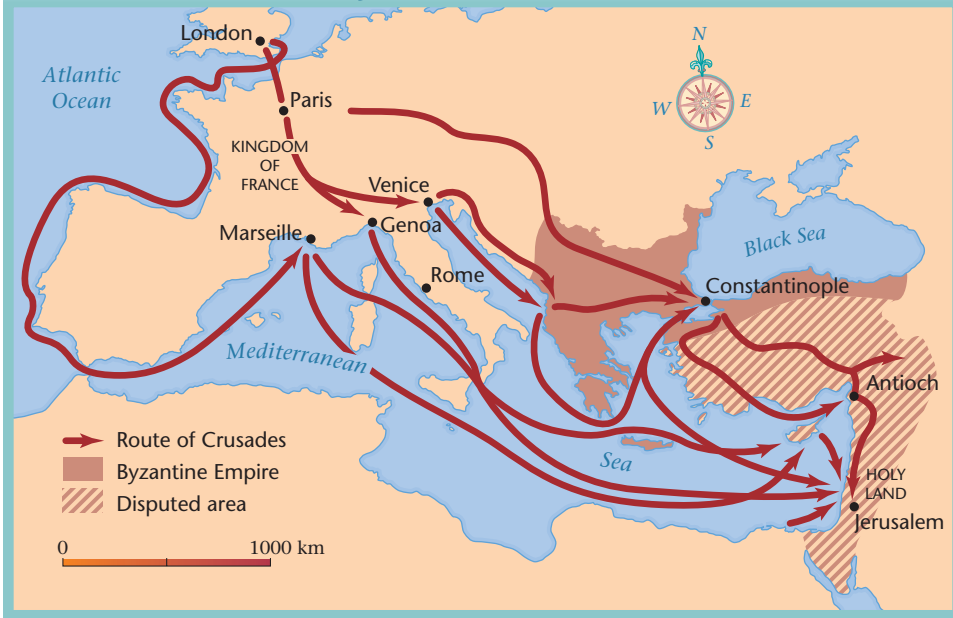
**Judaism:** the religion of the Jews, based on a belief in one God, as told in the Hebrew Bible, referred to as the Old Testament by Christians, and the teaching of rabbis

**Christianity:** the religion of the Christians, based on a belief in one God, as told in the Old Testament of the Bible and the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament

**Islam:** the religion of the Muslims, based on a belief in one God, based on the teachings of Muhammad as revealed in the Koran (Qur'an)

**pilgrim:** a person who journeys to a sacred place for religious purposes

### Crusades to the Holy Land, 1095–1291



This map indicates the main travel routes Europeans used during the Crusades. Control of the disputed areas went back and forth between Christians and Muslims.

In the Middle Ages, most Western Europeans belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. There were no other Christian denominations.

The Crusades occurred over hundreds of years. The relationships among Christians and Muslims developed in various ways during periods of peace and periods of war.

### REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. What were key factors that led to the beginning of the Renaissance?
2. Identify two different ways in which religion affected the worldview at this time.
3. Many factors help to shape your identity. Think of an experience you have had in which you encountered different ways of doing things, different architecture, different foods, or perhaps different music. How did ideas about yourself and the world change because of this experience?
4. During the Middle Ages, wealthy individuals often donated money to the Roman Catholic Church to be used to help the poor. Today, this would be considered an act of responsible citizenship. Would those donations given in the Middle Ages have been looked at in the same way, considering the worldview of the time?