

## **Myths and Legends about the 'Dark Ages'**

We found this remarkable study on the Internet and just had to share it with you. Most Catholics have been brainwashed by modern academia into thinking that the Middle Ages was a primitive, superstitious, barbaric, unscientific and uneducated time of history. Not according to this assemblage of facts and figures. Two brief studies titled: "The Top 10 Reasons the 'Dark Ages' Were Not Dark" and "Ten Myths about the Middle Ages" are provided here for your enlightenment and encouragement. In many respects, the Middle Ages were far superior to the Modern Age. I can easily testify to this, since in the areas of religion, philosophy, science, government, family, art, culture, music, crime, *etc.*, the Middle Ages was ahead by leaps and bounds. The only real advancement of the Modern Age is technology, but we have seen where that often leads – creating more ways to sin faster and more thoroughly than ever before. The reality is, the Modern Age is the real "Dark Ages." NB: I have reformatted this article for easier reading and made a few edits (one concerning Copernicus' contribution to the Middle Ages, since the author is wrong about his assertions). Otherwise, the article is at is stands in the source reference.

Robert Sungenis

# Top 10 Reasons the “Dark Ages”

## Were Not Dark

[The author writes] I believe that we can safely say that the period of man’s history from 476 AD to 1000 AD is the most maligned of all. This period, known to historians as the Early Middle Ages, is still referred to by most laymen as the Dark Ages. In fact the term “dark ages” is almost as ancient as the period itself – it was coined in the 1330s by Petrarch, the Italian scholar, to refer to the decline of Latin literature. It was later taken by the protestant reformers (16th century) and then the members of the Enlightenment (18th century) as a derogatory term with much broader implications, because they saw their own “enlightenment” as absent from the earlier period. Hardly a fair judgment on the past. Fortunately for modern students of history, the term is now officially known as the Early Middle Ages – a name which has no connotations at all. So, having given you the background on the terms, here are ten reasons that the dark ages were, in fact, a period of great progress and light.



### Reason 10

#### Universities Are Born

The Classical Education (still used today in some schools) was the system used by the Universities which were created in the Early Middle Ages (the first in history). The universities taught the arts, law, medicine, and theology (the study of religion). The University of Bologna (founded in 1088) was the first ever to grant degrees. In addition to the classical structure (based on Ancient Greek education), these medieval universities were heavily influenced by Islamic education which was thriving at the time. While women were not admitted to Universities in the early days, the

education of women did exist. The convents of the day educated the young women who would often enter at a very young age. One such women (Hildegard Von Bingen) is one of the most celebrated women of the Medieval era who had great influence over the men in power at the time.



## Reason 9

### Scientific Foundations Laid

While progress in Science was slow during this period in the West, the progress was steady and of a very high quality. The foundation was laid here for the wonderful blossoming of science that was to occur in the High Middle Ages to come. It can be safely said, that without the study of Science in the Early Middle Ages, we would be considerably behind in our scientific knowledge today. Ronald Numbers (professor at Cambridge University) has said: 'Notions such as: "the rise of Christianity killed off ancient science", "the medieval Christian Church suppressed the growth of the natural sciences", "the medieval Christians thought that the world was flat", and "the Church prohibited autopsies and dissections during the Middle Ages" [are] examples of widely popular *myths* that still pass as historical truth, even though they are not supported by historical research.' [Source: [Video or audio Lecture](#)]



## Reason 8

### Carolingian Renaissance

The Carolingian Renaissance was a period of advancements in literature, writing, the arts, architecture, jurisprudence, liturgical and scriptural studies which occurred in the late eighth and ninth centuries. The Carolingians were Franks and the most well known is Charlemagne. The Carolingian empire was considered a rebirth of the culture of the Roman Empire. At the time, Vulgar Latin was beginning to be replaced by various dialects as the main spoken languages in Europe, so the creation of schools was vital to spread knowledge further amongst the common people. It was also this period which gave us the foundation of Western Classical Music.



## Reason 7

### Byzantine Golden Age

Under Justinian this period gave us the Corpus Juris Civilis (Body of Civil law) – an enormous compendium of Roman Law. Literacy was high, elementary education was widespread (even in the countryside), middle education was available to many people, and higher education (as discussed above) was also widely accessible. In the Byzantine empire during this period we saw a massive outpouring of books – encyclopedias, lexicons, and anthologies. While they did not create a lot of new thinking, they solidified and protected for the future much of what was already known.



## Reason 6

### Religious Unity

This is a sticky topic, but the fact is, during the Early Middle Ages, Europe had a united Church, an agreed upon canon of the Bible, and a well developed philosophical tradition. This led (as one would expect) to a great period of peace within the Western nations. While Islam was not in agreement with the doctrines of the West, much mutual sharing of information happened and the Islamic contribution to the West is still felt today. This union of beliefs allowed for intellectual progress unseen since the Roman Empire at its heyday. In a sense you might consider this period as the calm before the storm, as it was merely a hundred years later that the first Crusade would be called to take Jerusalem back from the Muslims – an event which ended the flow of knowledge between groups.



## Reason 5

### Algebra Arrived

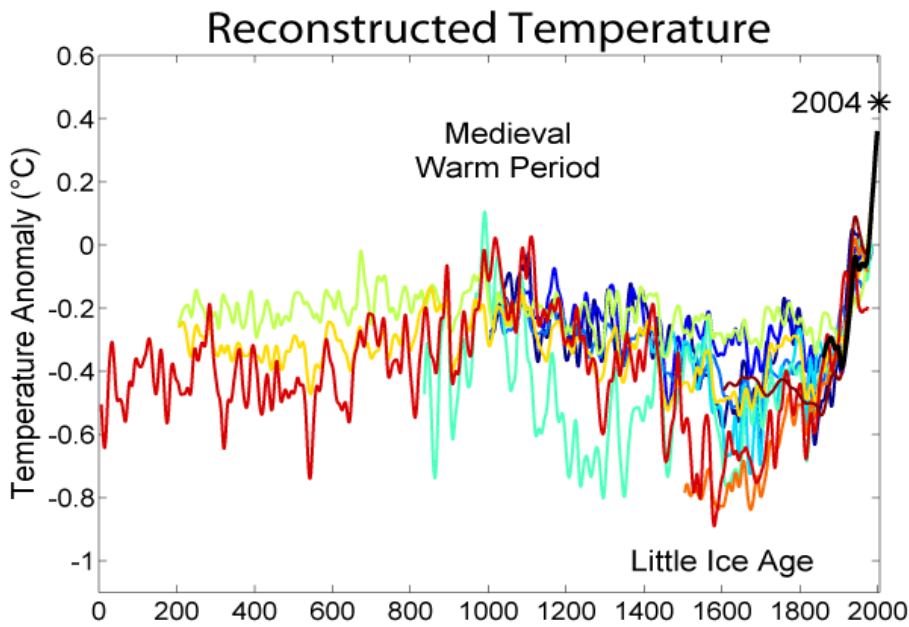
Thanks to the learning of the Islamic people in the East, the world received its first book on algebra. The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing was written by Al-Khwārizmī (790-840) and the Arabic title of the book gave us the word “algebra”. The word algorithm comes from al-Khwārizmī’s name. This book gave us the first systematic solution of linear and quadratic equations. Later translations of his books also gave us the [decimal positional number](#) system we use today. Al-Khwārizmī, along with [Diophantas](#), is considered the Father of algebra.



## Reason 4

### Art and Architecture

During the Early Middle Ages, architecture was diverse and innovative. It introduced the idea of realistic images in art and it laid the groundwork for the Romanesque period which was to come in the High Middle Ages. The period also included the introduction and absorption of classical forms and concepts in architecture. It can safely be said that this period was the first period of high art – with previous styles (Migration period) being much more functional and less “artistic”. In the Early Middle Ages we witness the birth of an astonishing and beautiful history of art and building.



into an event now known as the Medieval Warm Period. This warm period thawed much ice and enabled the Vikings to begin their colonization of Greenland and other northern nations. Ironically, the Protestant reformation (16th century) up until the 19th century suffered the Little Ice Age – the period of “enlightenment” was literally darker and colder than the “dark” ages. During this period, reforms and better knowledge of agriculture provided a boost to food supplies.

### Reason 3

#### Fantastic Weather

Trivial as it may seem, the weather played a much greater part in the lives of the average people during the Middle Ages and beyond. When we think of the “Dark Ages” we tend to see images of snow storms, rain, thunder, and darkness – such as we see in films like “The Name of the Rose”. The fact is, in the Early Middle Ages, the North Atlantic region was warming up – so much so that at the opening of the High Middle Ages (1100 AD), the region was 100 years



### Reason 2

#### Law Becomes Fair

The Early Middle Ages had a complex system of laws which were often not connected, but they were effective and fair for the most part. For merchants traveling around the world, there was the *Lex Mercatoria* (Law Merchant) which had evolved over time, rather than being created. This law included arbitration and promoted good practice amongst traders. At the same time, Anglo Saxon Law was formed with a focus on keeping peace in the land. While this eventually lead to some very tough laws, living under the legal system in the Early Middle Ages was probably the best time to live – as it was still flexible and fair for the majority. The third important legal system was the Early Germanic Law which allowed each person to be tried by his own people – so as to not be disadvantaged by ignorance or major cultural differences.

## Reason 1

### Agricultural Boom

If you were wanting to die a martyr by starvation, the Early Middle Ages were not the time to do it! As a consequence of the excellent weather and greater agricultural knowledge, the West did extremely well. Iron tools were in wide use in the Byzantine empire, feudalism in other parts of the world introduced efficient management of land, and massive surpluses were created so that animals were fed on grains and not grass. Public safety was also guaranteed under the feudal system and so peace and prosperity was the lot for most people.



SOURCE: <http://listverse.com/2008/06/09/top-10-reasons-the-dark-ages-were-not-dark/>

# Top 10 Myths about the Middle Ages

The Middle Ages spanned roughly from the 5th century to the 16th century – a total of 1,100 years. During the time following the Middle Ages (which is often referred to as the Enlightenment), the previous millennium was criticized and condemned – just as we now condemn the actions of some during the Victorian Period (sexual prudishness for example). Many of the writers of the newly invented Protestant movement harshly attacked the Middle Ages because of its Catholicity. Unfortunately many of the myths and misconceptions that sprung up at the time are still believed today. This list aims to set things straight.



## Myth 10: Death Penalty

Despite what many people believe, the Middle Ages gave birth to the jury system and trials were in fact very fair. The death penalty was considered to be extremely severe and was used only in the worst cases of crimes like murder, treason, and arson. It was not until the Middle Ages began to draw to a close that people like Elizabeth I began to use the death penalty as a means to rid their nations of religious opponents. Public beheadings were not as we

see in the movies – they were given only to the rich, and were usually not performed in public. The most common method of execution was hanging – and burning was extremely rare (and usually performed after the criminal had been hanged to death first).

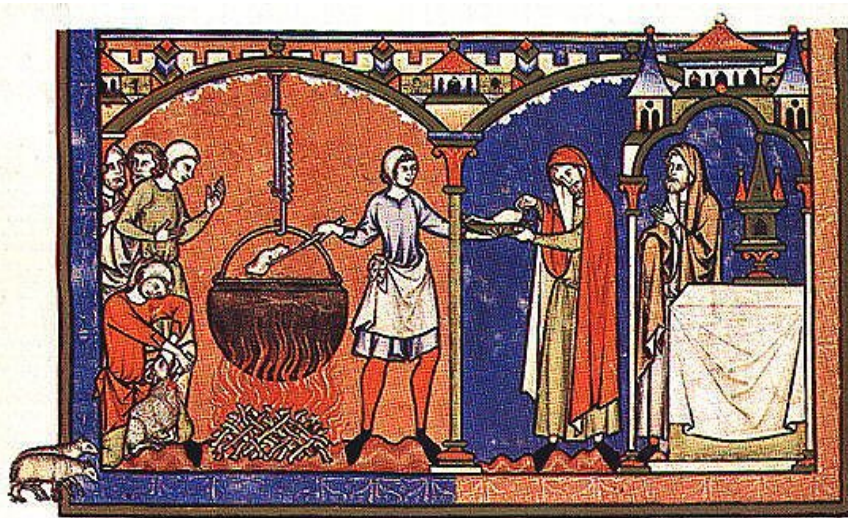




## Myth 9: Locked Bibles

During the Middle Ages (until Gutenberg came along) all books had to be written by hand. This was a painstaking task which took many months – particularly with a book as large as the Bible. The job of hand-printing books was left to monks tucked away in monasteries. These books were incredibly valuable and they were needed in every Church as the Bible was read aloud at Mass every day. In order to protect these valuable books, they would be locked away. There was no conspiracy to keep the Bible from the people – the locks meant that the

Church could guarantee that the people could hear the Bible (many wouldn't have been able to read) every day. And just to show that it wasn't just the Catholic Church that locked up the Bibles for safety, the most famous "chained bible" is the "Great Bible" which Henry VIII had created and ordered to be read in the protestant churches. [You can read more about that here.](#) The Catholic diocese of Lincoln makes a comment on the practice [here.](#)



## Myth 8: Starving Poor

This is completely false. Peasants (those who worked in manual work) would have had fresh porridge and bread daily – with beer to drink. In addition, each day would have an assortment of dried or cured meats, cheeses, and fruits and vegetables from their area. Poultry, chicken, ducks, pigeons, and geese were not uncommon on the peasants dinner table. Some peasants also liked to keep bees, to provide honey for their tables. Given the choice between McDonalds and

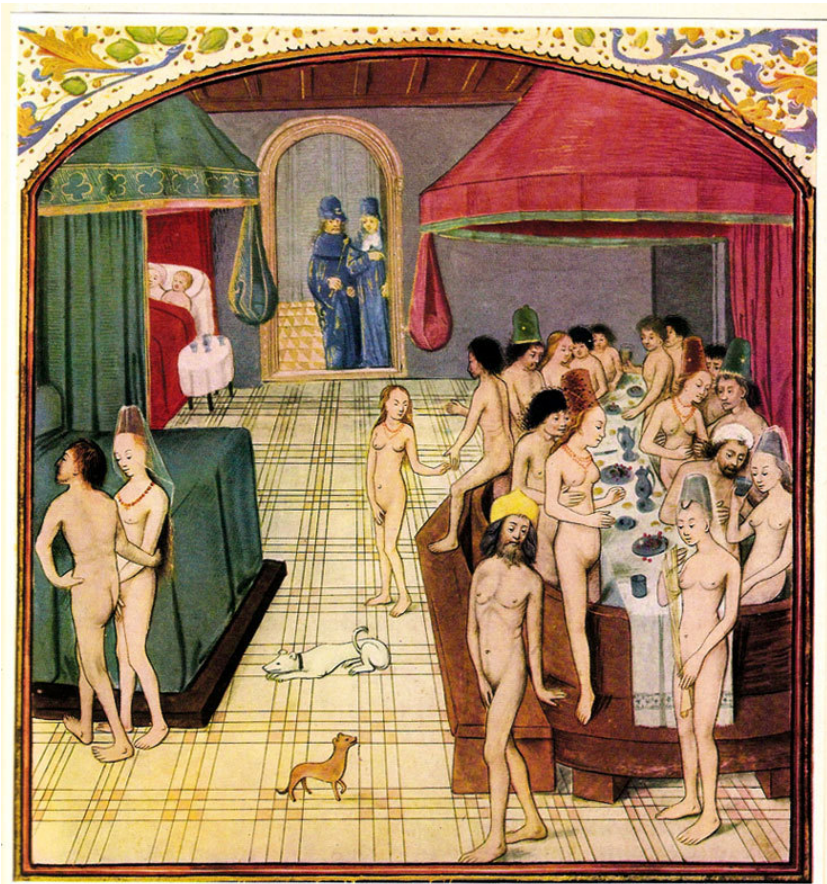
Medieval peasant food, I suspect the peasant food would be more nutritious and tasty. The rich of the time had a great choice of meats – such as cattle, and sheep. They would eat more courses for each meal than the poor, and would probably have had a number of spiced dishes – something the poor could not afford. [Wikipedia has an interesting article here](#) which describes the mostly vegetable and grain diet of the peasants in the early Middle Ages, leading to more meat in the later period.



## Myth 7: Thatched Roofs

First of all, the thatched roofs of Medieval dwellings were woven into a tight mat – they were not just bundles of straw and sticks thrown on top of the house. Animals would not easily have been able to get inside the roof – and considering how concerned the average Middle Ager was, if an animal did get inside, they would be promptly removed – just as we remove birds or other small creatures that enter our homes today. And for the record, thatched roofs were not just for the poor – many castles and grander homes had them as well – because they worked so well. There are

many homes in English villages today that still have thatched roofs.



## Myth 6: Smelly People

Not only is this a total myth, it is so widely believed that it has given rise to a whole other series of myths, such as the false belief that Church incense was designed to hide the stink of so many people in one place. In fact, the incense was part of the Church's rituals due to its history coming from the Jewish religion which also used incense in its sacrifices. This myth has also lead to the strange idea that people usually married in May or June because they didn't stink so badly – having had their yearly bath. It is, of course, utter rubbish. People married in those months because marriage was not allowed during Lent (the season of penance). So, back to smelly people. In the Middle Ages, most towns had bathhouses – in fact, cleanliness and hygiene was very highly regarded – so much so that bathing was incorporated into various ceremonies such as those surrounding knighthood. Some people bathed daily, others less

regularly – but most people bathed. Furthermore, they used hot water – they just had to heat it up themselves, unlike us with our modern plumbed hot water. The French put it best in the following Latin statement: Venari, ludere, lavari, bibere; Hoc est vivere! (To hunt, to play, to wash, to drink, – This is to live!)



## Myth 5: Peasant Life

It is said that peasants lived a life of drudgery and back-breaking work. In fact, while peasants in the Middle Ages did work hard (tilling the fields was the only way to ensure you could eat), they had regular festivals (religious and secular) which involved dancing, drinking, games, and tournaments. Many of the games from the time are still played today: chess, checkers, dice, blind man's bluff, and many more. It may not seem as fun as the latest game for the Wii, but it was a great opportunity to enjoy the especially warm weather that was caused by the Medieval Warming Period.



## Myth 4: Violence Everywhere

While there was violence in the Middle Ages (just as there had always been), there were no equals to our modern Stalin, Hitler, and Mao. Most people lived their lives without experiencing violence. The Inquisition was not the violent bloodlust that many movies and books have claimed it to be, and most modern historians now admit this readily. Modern times have seen genocide, mass murder, and serial killing – something virtually unheard of before the “enlightenment”. In fact, there are really only two serial killers of note from the Middle Ages: [Elizabeth](#)

[Bathory](#), and [Gilles de Rais](#). For those who dispute the fact that the Inquisition resulted in very few deaths, [Wikipedia has the statistics here](#) showing that there were (at most) 826 recorded executions over a 160 year period – from 45,000 trials!



### Myth 3: Oppressed Women

In the 1960s and 1970s, the idea that women were oppressed in the Middle Ages flourished. In fact, all we need to do is think of a few significant women from the period to see that that is not true at all: St Joan of Arc was a young woman who was given full control of the French army! Her downfall was political and would have occurred whether she were male or female. Hildegard von Bingen was a polymath in the Middle Ages who was held in such high esteem that Kings, Popes, and Lords all sought her advice. Her music and writing exists to this day. Elizabeth I ruled as a powerful queen in her own right, and many other nations had women leaders. Granted women did not work on Cathedrals but they certainly pulled their weight in the fields and villages. Furthermore, the rules of chivalry meant that women had to be treated with the greatest of dignity. The biggest difference between the concept of feminism in the Middle Ages and now is that in the Middle Ages it was believed that women were “equal in dignity, different in function” – now the concept has been modified to “equal in dignity and function”.

### Myth 2: Flat Earth

Two modern historians recently published a book in which they say: “there was scarcely a Christian scholar of the Middle Ages who did not acknowledge [Earth's] sphericity and even know its approximate circumference.”



### Myth 1: Crude and Ignorant

Thanks largely to Hollywood movies, many people believe that the Middle Ages were full of religious superstition and ignorance. But in fact, leading historians deny that there is any evidence of this. Science and philosophy blossomed at the time – partly due to the introduction of Universities all over Europe. The Middle ages produced some of the greatest art, music, and literature in all history. Boethius, Boccaccio, Dante, Petrarch, and Machiavelli are still revered today for their brilliant minds. The cathedrals and castles of Europe are still standing and contain some of the most beautiful artwork and stonework man has been able to create with his bare hands. Medicine at the time was primitive, but it was structured and willing to embrace new ideas when they arose (which is how we have modern medicine).

SOURCE: <http://listverse.com/2009/01/07/top-10-myths-about-the-middle-ages/>

Other similar sources: [http://www.traditioninaction.org/History/A\\_005\\_Myths1500s.html](http://www.traditioninaction.org/History/A_005_Myths1500s.html)

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