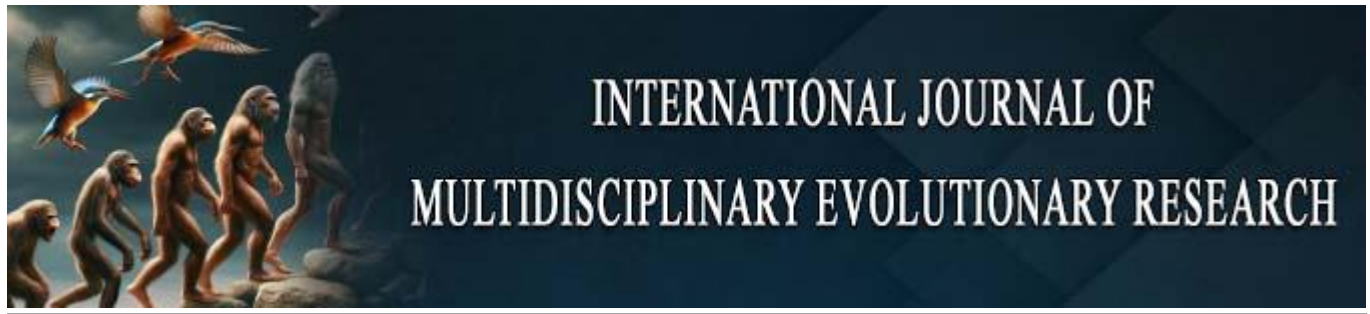




Conceptualizing the Past in the Medieval Imagination: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Following the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD, the medieval period emerged and continued until the 15th century AD. As noted by Trigger (2006), medieval perceptions of the past can be categorized under several dominant conceptual themes. One major notion was the belief surrounding the origins of the world and early humanity. Medieval observers encountering monumental architectural remains frequently interpreted them as creations beyond ordinary human ability, often attributing them to giants or supernatural beings (Duby, 1980). The exceptional strength and craftsmanship of these structures led to widespread assumptions that they contained hidden valuables, especially gold. Consequently, early grave excavations were driven not only by the prospect of material gain but also by fascination with the marvels of antiquity (Le Goff, 1988). By the height of the medieval period, fear of curses or magical forces associated with ancient sites had diminished, replaced by intellectual curiosity regarding their uniqueness and origins. The medieval worldview was further shaped by the Church, which asserted theological authority over interpretations of creation and history. When scientific explanations arose concerning the formation of the world, ecclesiastical doctrine reaffirmed divine creation as the ultimate truth (Southern, 1990). Although scientific thinking developed during this period, it remained closely linked to, and constrained by, theological frameworks (Grant, 1996). The Church taught that the world had become corrupted following the sin of Adam and Eve, resulting in the dispersion and moral decline of humanity. Natural decay and transformation were thus interpreted as evidence of the world's progressive degradation. Another prevailing medieval idea was that global history unfolded as a sequence of divinely preordained events, a view reinforced by biblical narratives (Collingwood, 1993). History was understood as fragmented and imperfect, while the past was interpreted as both transitional and miraculous, inviting theological as well as emerging scientific explanations. Although the dominance of the Church restricted systematic empirical study, medieval writings on antiquity nevertheless laid an important conceptual foundation for later archaeological thought (Trigger, 2006). Overall, the Middle Ages can be characterized as a period in which understandings of the human past were framed within divine authority and idealized temporal structures. These medieval conceptions ultimately influenced the intellectual shifts of the Renaissance, which was supported by scientific advancements that spread widely by the 16th century AD (Burke, 1999).

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Introduction

The collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century AD marked a significant turning point in European intellectual, cultural, and political history, giving rise to what is commonly identified as the medieval period. This era, stretching roughly from the 5th to the 15th century AD, was characterized by profound shifts in how people understood the world, interpreted the past, and constructed historical meaning. Medieval societies inherited monumental structures, oral traditions, and fragmented historical narratives from antiquity, yet their interpretations of these remnants were shaped by theological, mythical, and emerging proto-scientific frameworks (Trigger, 2006)^[37]. As a result, the medieval imagination produced a highly idealized and spiritually oriented conception of the past.

One of the most influential forces in shaping medieval interpretations of antiquity was the Church, which asserted theological authority over explanations of creation, human origins, and historical development. According to Southern (1990) ^[33], ecclesiastical doctrine positioned divine authorship at the center of historical understanding, framing all events as part of a sacred continuum that originated with the Old Testament. This view contributed to the belief that early humans, or supernatural beings such as giants, constructed ancient monuments an interpretation reinforced by the remarkable scale and craftsmanship of these structures (Duby, 1980) ^[11]. Medieval communities frequently assumed that such features contained hidden wealth, prompting early yet unsystematic forms of excavation driven by curiosity, myth, and speculation rather than scientific inquiry (Le Goff, 1988) ^[21].

Despite the dominance of theological thought, the later medieval period witnessed the gradual emergence of scientific reasoning. Scholars and thinkers began to question and reinterpret long-held narratives, though these efforts were often presented in alignment with religious doctrine to avoid institutional conflict (Grant, 1996) ^[19]. This intellectual tension laid the groundwork for major transformations during the Renaissance. As Burke (1999) notes, Renaissance scholarship introduced new methodologies for studying the past, emphasizing empirical observation, critical analysis, and humanistic inquiry. Understanding medieval idealizations of the past is therefore essential not only for reconstructing historical consciousness during the Middle Ages but also for tracing the origins of modern archaeological and historical thought. These medieval conceptual frameworks, while limited by theological constraints, ultimately contributed to the development of more systematic approaches to understanding human antiquity.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative, interpretive methodology designed to examine how medieval societies conceptualized the past and how these ideas contributed to the early foundations of archaeological thought. The study followed a textual analysis approach, relying primarily on secondary literature from archaeology, medieval studies, religious history, and historiography. Authoritative scholarly works—including Trigger (2006), Le Goff (1988), Southern (1990), and Burke (1998, 1999)—served as the core analytical sources due to their contributions to understanding medieval intellectual frameworks. These texts were systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes, ideological structures, and explanatory models used in medieval interpretations of antiquity. The research also incorporated comparative historical analysis to contrast medieval perceptions with earlier prehistoric perspectives and later Renaissance and early modern developments. This allowed the study to situate medieval thought within a broader continuum of changing attitudes toward the past.

The methodology emphasized thematic categorization to synthesize major medieval ideologies, including beliefs about creation, chronology, divine intervention, degradation, material culture, and supernatural explanations. Case studies such as interpretations of Stonehenge and accounts of treasure-motivated grave excavations were examined through a contextual reading of medieval chronicles, modern archaeological interpretations, and historical commentaries. This approach facilitated an understanding of how mythic

narratives shaped early engagements with ancient material remains. Since the study is conceptual rather than empirical, no fieldwork or quantitative analysis was undertaken. Instead, the research relied on critical evaluation of published scholarship to trace intellectual shifts leading toward scientific archaeology. Overall, this methodological framework enabled a comprehensive interpretation of medieval worldviews and their influence on the development of archaeological reasoning.

Results and Discussion

Before examining medieval perspectives on the past, it is essential to understand how earlier societies conceptualized antiquity. During prehistoric times, humans perceived the past as a realm imbued with supernatural or mystical power, an abstract sphere inaccessible to the physical senses and understood through mythic or sacred frameworks (Trigger, 2006) ^[37]. This perception positioned the past as a mysterious and spiritually potent temporal domain that warranted reverence. Consequently, early communities selected aspects of the past as symbolic markers capable of strengthening collective identity and fostering cultural cohesion (Collingwood, 1993) ^[7]. Over time, however, this idealized worldview began to transform. With the rise of early civilizations such as the Babylonians, individuals like Belshalti-Nannar initiated deliberate inquiries into ancient sites, marking an early shift toward empirical curiosity about material remains (Foster, 2005) ^[15]. This growing interest in the tangible cultural elements of antiquity contributed to the gradual emergence of proto-archaeological practices. As Trigger (2006) notes, these developments laid the groundwork for the foundational principles of scientific archaeology. Thus, by the end of the prehistoric era, it is evident that humans had come to conceptualize the past as a mysterious and hidden temporal sphere defined by mythic significance rather than systematic inquiry.

Following the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD, the medieval period began, extending until the 15th century AD. The shift in attitudes toward the past during this era can therefore be examined in relation to earlier prehistoric conceptions. The European Middle Ages are frequently characterized as an intellectual “dark age” due to limitations on secular knowledge, but they also represent an era deeply shaped by theological authority (Southern, 1990) ^[33]. Medieval thought, centered in Europe, formed the basis for the later development of archaeological theory, while parallel traditions in Asia did not produce similar trajectories. This divergence is partly attributed to Buddhist philosophical perspectives, which emphasize living in the present moment, thereby diminishing the perceived necessity of studying either the past or the future (Rahula, 1974) ^[30]. As a result, systematic inquiry into antiquity developed differently across cultural regions, with Europe emerging as the primary locus of early archaeological thought.

1st Ideology:

According to B. C. Trigger (2006) ^[37], medieval understandings of the past can be examined under several major thematic categories. The first of these concerns ideas about the creation of the world. In the medieval imagination, monumental structures and ancient pillars inherited from earlier societies were often perceived as feats beyond the capacity of ordinary humans. As Duby (1980) explains, medieval communities commonly attributed such

constructions to giants or other extraordinary beings, particularly when the structures displayed strength, sophistication, or unusual craftsmanship. This belief encouraged the assumption that these monuments contained hidden treasures most notably gold or other valuable objects thereby stimulating widespread curiosity and occasional attempts at excavation or pillage (Le Goff, 1988) ^[21].

Such interpretations led many to assert that these remarkable works were constructed by superhuman figures. A well-known example is the medieval belief recorded in the 14th century that Stonehenge had been built by the legendary wizard Merlin, a narrative illustrating the era's reliance on mythic explanations to interpret archaeological remains (Parker Pearson, 2013) ^[28]. As interest in these ancient sites expanded, societies gradually began producing descriptive accounts and early forms of mapping, reflecting a shift toward documenting their significance.

This growing curiosity required authoritative explanation, prompting the medieval Church to intervene in shaping intellectual discourse about the world's origins. The Church increasingly sought to regulate knowledge by grounding historical interpretation within a fixed temporal framework. For instance, according to ancient Hebrew tradition, the world was believed to have been created in 3761 BCE (Sarna, 1989) ^[32]. Pope Clement III later proposed a creation date of 5199 BCE, while in the 17th century Archbishop James Ussher famously calculated the date of creation as 23 October 4004 BCE (Ussher, 1658/2003) ^[38]. These chronological models illustrate the Church's efforts to fit all historical events within a divinely ordained timeline. By assigning precise dates and temporal boundaries, medieval scholars attempted to provide the past with structured notions of time and space, thereby transforming historical interpretation into a systematized chronology (Southern, 1990) ^[33].

2nd Ideology:

Early grave excavations were initially undertaken not for the purpose of systematic archaeological inquiry, but due to the belief that such sites contained valuable or extraordinary objects. By the medieval period, people increasingly assumed that ancient communities who constructed these monuments possessed exceptional capabilities or wealth, prompting curiosity rather than fear of supernatural forces, sacred powers, or curses associated with these places (Trigger, 2006) ^[37]. This curiosity was largely driven by the distinctive and enigmatic nature of these material remains, which led medieval observers to imagine that the people of antiquity were more affluent than those of their own era and that they had deposited gold or other precious goods within these sites (Renfrew & Bahn, 2016) ^[31]. Consequently, the excavation of ancient burial chambers and monumental structures became popular, even when genuine discoveries were rare. Over time, the focus shifted from seeking treasure to exploring the uniqueness of these sites, as their extraordinary characteristics began attracting individuals eager to view them firsthand (Childe, 1956) ^[6]. Eventually, such activities evolved into a form of leisure for wealthy individuals, contributing to a broader global interest in locating and documenting ancient cultural monuments. This fascination ultimately led to more systematic mapping and recording of archaeological sites across different regions (Fagan & Durrani, 2016) ^[13]. Another belief that emerged during this period was that the builders of these monumental structures possessed supernatural or extraordinary strength. As a result,

they were often imagined as giants or heroic figures whose physical power surpassed that of ordinary humans (Darvill, 2008) ^[8]. For instance, fourteenth-century British records claimed that the world-famous stone monuments were constructed by a giant named Merlin, reflecting medieval mythological interpretations of ancient architectural achievements (Pryor, 2013) ^[29].

3rd Ideology:

The Medieval period can be identified as an era in which the Church consistently emphasized the primacy of divine power and revelation. During this time, theological authority dominated explanations of the natural world, particularly when scientific scholars began proposing alternative interpretations regarding the origins and structure of the universe (Grant, 2004) ^[20]. As scientific thinking gradually emerged, the Church often felt compelled to respond in order to reaffirm doctrinal teachings. Thus, the Medieval period may be understood as both a time when scientific inquiry was developing and when ecclesiastical authority was simultaneously at its height (Lindberg, 2007) ^[24]. Consequently, any scientific argument presented during this era was typically interpreted in relation to Christian doctrine, which positioned God as the ultimate creator of all beings, objects, and phenomena.

A central belief of the period was that God created all living organisms, plants, rocks, and animals, as well as every social and moral order governing the world (Augustine, trans. 2017) ^[3]. Efforts to articulate the nature of creation led to the construction of explanatory frameworks that linked cosmology with theological chronology. Within this context, Aristotle's influential cosmological model the geocentric theory held significant authority. Aristotle argued that Earth was one of the celestial bodies and that the remaining heavenly spheres revolved around it (Aristotle, trans. 1984) ^[2]. The Church did not oppose this perspective because it aligned with Scriptural interpretations and supported the broader theological worldview. In addition, ecclesiastical teachings maintained that the motion of celestial bodies was guided by divine messengers, reinforcing the belief that the heavens operated according to spiritual agency (Lindberg, 1992) ^[23].

Although emergent scientific methods were acknowledged during this era, they remained subordinate to theological authority. God was regarded as the creator of all existence, and according to Christian doctrine, Adam was fashioned in the image of God, followed by the creation of Eve to complete human companionship in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1–3, New Revised Standard Version) ^[16]. As a consequence of their actions, humanity introduced "sin" into the world, reinforcing the Church's claim to moral and spiritual governance. The Church therefore assumed responsibility for guiding humanity, with the Popes positioned as the principal interpreters of divine law. Among these influential figures, Thomas Aquinas played a significant role in articulating theological explanations that harmonized Christian doctrine with classical philosophy (Aquinas, trans. 2020) ^[1].

4th Ideology:

Following the introduction of sin into the world by Adam and Eve, Christian doctrine maintains that humanity became inherently inclined toward sinfulness. As a result, the Church taught that the purity with which God originally created the

world had been corrupted (Augustine, trans. 2017) ^[3]. This moral decline subsequently led to the dispersion of Adam and Eve's descendants across the world, where the misuse of God-given resources began to increase. Within this theological framework, all alterations and degradation observed in the natural environment were interpreted as signs of the diminishing integrity of God's creation. The uncontrolled consumption of natural resources was therefore seen as necessitating divine intervention to prevent further decline (Aquinas, trans. 2020) ^[1].

The Garden of Eden is traditionally located within the Near Eastern region, and the spread of Adam and Eve's descendants across the earth ultimately forms the basis for the theological narrative of population dispersal. According to the Book of Genesis, God entrusted Noah with the responsibility of removing corruption from the world. Noah's Flood, described as a divine act intended to cleanse the earth of impurity, represents another significant theological explanation through which the Church countered emerging scientific interpretations (Genesis 6–9, New Revised Standard Version) ^[16]. Within this doctrinal perspective, the creation of the world, the dispersion of humanity, and recurring large-scale destruction are understood as interconnected elements of divine history. Studies in geology and archaeology have linked the narrative of a great flood to known natural events in various regions. One often cited example is the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization, a highly developed urban society that experienced severe disruptions. Archaeological and paleoclimatic research suggests that, for nearly 450 years, weakened monsoon patterns and prolonged drought conditions destabilized agricultural production, ultimately contributing to the civilization's collapse (Giosan *et al.*, 2012; Wright, 2010) ^[18, 40]. These climatic shifts affected not only the Indus region but also the wider trans-Himalayan and West Asian areas. Data from sediment cores along the Nile and other fluvial systems further support the interpretation that the period was characterized by significant climatic variability, providing a scientific context that parallels ancient flood traditions found in multiple cultures (Stanley & Krom, 2007) ^[35].

5th Ideology:

Another Medieval perspective on world history held that history unfolded as a sequence of divinely ordered events. Biblical narratives attempted to interpret human experiences as part of a cosmological process guided by God's prophetic design (Eliade, 1974) ^[12]. According to this view, all significant historical developments occurred in accordance with divine intention. The Church further reinforced this by asserting that history consists largely of fragmented remnants rather than complete, fully perfected events. Only a few moments approached divine perfection, and these were used to illustrate the moral and spiritual lessons embedded in sacred history (Aquinas, trans. 2020) ^[1]. Christian doctrine maintains that God created the world in an ideal state, and therefore all civilizations and human cultures originated from this divine creation (Genesis 1–2, New Revised Standard Version) ^[16]. Over time, however, these original creations were believed to have deteriorated as a consequence of sin. Within this theological interpretation, the loss of the primordial perfection of the world is conceptualized through what scholars refer to as the "Theory of Degradation," which explains historical change as a process of decline from an original divine ideal (Dawson, 1950) ^[10]. Accordingly,

Medieval scholarship sought to interpret the past through religious frameworks, emphasizing that understanding history necessarily meant understanding God's purpose for humanity.

Biblical teachings shaped the Medieval worldview, particularly regarding conceptions of time, humanity, and the past. All historical development was interpreted as beginning with divine creation and eventually returning to God's judgment or restoration (Augustine, trans. 2017) ^[3]. After purifying the world through the Flood, God addressed the remaining human population, yet some groups failed to understand His language. This was interpreted as the origin of linguistic diversity, as presented in the narrative of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11, NRSV) ^[16]. Differences in human appearance, cultural forms, and social identities were understood by the Church as divinely instituted expressions of unique communal identities (O'Donovan, 1999) ^[27]. Archaeological discoveries such as stone tools, pottery, and other artifacts were also interpreted by Medieval theologians through a religious lens. Rather than viewing such objects as evidence of human technological development, early Church interpretations suggested that these materials served as reminders of the sins committed by ancient human populations. Thus, material remains were understood as moral and spiritual markers objects meant to recall humanity's past transgressions and the enduring consequences of sin (Le Goff, 1988) ^[21].

6th Ideology:

Accordingly, during the Medieval period, the past was interpreted as a manifestation of cosmic and miraculous processes. This worldview framed historical events as extraordinary occurrences, which in turn encouraged both theological and early scientific interpretations of the past (Le Goff, 1988) ^[21]. Although scientific knowledge began to gain recognition during this era, the Church continued to assert its authority, seeking to consolidate its influence within society even as new intellectual perspectives emerged (Southern, 1990) ^[33]. As scientific explanations of the past began to surface, the Church simultaneously introduced theological concepts that would accompany or counter these interpretations. Medieval interest in the past grew partly from curiosity about ancient structures and monuments; rather than engaging in systematic research, people often explored or excavated these remains in search of valuables or out of fascination with their mysterious origins (Trigger, 2006) ^[37]. Over time, such explorations revealed that the past differed significantly from the present, and the objects found such as coins, stones, and crafted artifacts were collected and valued as symbols of status and prestige.

These discoveries encouraged the development of early collecting practices. By the 8th and 9th centuries CE, prominent figures such as Charlemagne and Frederick Barbarossa began assembling collections of ancient coins, gems, and semi-precious stones. This period marks one of the earliest documented phases of antiquarian collecting, driven by elite fascination with material traces of earlier civilizations (Murray, 2004) ^[26]. The first figure commonly regarded as an archaeologist is Cyriac of Ancona (Ciriaco d'Ancona), who lived from 1391 to 1452. Residing in Ancona, he spent nearly twenty-five years travelling throughout Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean, systematically recording inscriptions, monuments, and ancient ruins (Weiss, 2022) ^[39]. His work is often considered the earliest attempt to document antiquities

in a structured and scholarly manner, earning him recognition as the “father of archaeology.”

These developments reveal that medieval antiquarian activities were largely accessible only to wealthy individuals who had the means to travel and collect artifacts. Consequently, medieval conceptions of the past were strongly shaped by religious ideology, and attempts to place history within specific temporal and spatial frameworks often encountered resistance from the Church. As scientific interpretations gained prominence, ecclesiastical authority increasingly struggled to suppress or control these emerging intellectual currents. This tension eventually reached a point where traditional theological explanations could no longer withstand scientific scrutiny. A key example is the challenge posed by Charles Darwin’s global explorations and the publication of *On the Origin of Species* (Darwin, 1859) [9], which fundamentally reshaped conceptions of human and natural history. Throughout the Medieval period, scholars were more interested in material remnants of the past than in understanding broader historical transformations, marking an important distinction between antiquarian curiosity and modern scientific archaeology.



Fig 1: The European ideologies emerged as the primary locus of early archaeological thought.

Medieval Perceptions of the Past: Ideas about Creation and Chronology

Medieval interpretations of the past were deeply shaped by the authority of the Christian Church, which positioned biblical revelation as the primary lens for understanding human origins and historical time. Ecclesiastical scholars framed world history within a sacred cosmology centered on divine creation, the Fall, and salvation history, thereby limiting alternative interpretations of the human past (Southern, 1990) [33]. Chronological models such as those derived from Hebrew genealogical traditions significantly influenced medieval thought, providing a structured timeline that located creation only a few thousand years before the Christian era (McCreedy, 1993) [25]. This framework was later formalized through clerical scholarship, including the chronological calculations of Pope Clement VI and the influential seventeenth-century chronology proposed by Archbishop James Ussher, who dated the creation of the world to 4004 BCE (Ussher, 1650/2003) [38]. These theological chronologies established rigid and authoritative temporal boundaries within which all past events were interpreted, contributing to the development of a highly structured and predetermined worldview that dominated medieval historiographical thought.

Material Curiosity and Exploration of Ancient Sites

Although medieval scholarship was largely theological, there was also a sustained fascination with the physical remains of earlier civilizations. Medieval writers and pilgrims frequently recorded encounters with ancient monuments, ruins, and artifacts, interpreting them through allegorical, biblical, or mythical frameworks rather than historical analysis (Le Goff, 1988) [21]. Many material discoveries such as large bones or monumental stone structures were attributed to the actions of giants or superhuman beings, reflecting a symbolic worldview rather than an empirical one (Flint, 1991) [14]. Sites like Stonehenge attracted particular interest, often explained through mythic narratives such as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s account attributing its construction to the wizard Merlin, who supposedly transported the stones through magical means (Geoffrey of Monmouth, 1966) [17]. Such interpretations illustrate how medieval curiosity about ancient material culture coexisted with supernatural explanations, laying an early foundation for the later, more scientific interest in antiquities that emerged during the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

Transition to Scientific Archaeology

The transition from medieval mythic interpretation to scientific archaeology emerged gradually as scholars began to adopt more systematic and empirical methods for investigating the past. Although earlier understandings of ancient sites had been shaped largely by religious doctrine, folklore, and supernatural explanations, intellectual developments from the late Middle Ages onward encouraged a growing emphasis on observation and evidence-based inquiry (Trigger, 2006) [37]. The adoption of practices such as mapping, sketching, and written documentation of architectural remains and artifacts marked a significant step toward methodological rigor, enabling investigators to record sites with increasing precision and to compare findings across regions (Renfrew & Bahn, 2016) [31]. These innovations laid the conceptual foundations for Renaissance antiquarianism, which in turn fostered the emergence of modern archaeological thought by framing the past as a subject that could be systematically studied rather than merely interpreted through theological narratives. As a result, the early modern period witnessed the gradual establishment of archaeology as an empirical discipline grounded in material evidence and critical analysis.

Case Studies and Medieval Interpretations of Ancient Remains

Medieval engagement with ancient sites is illustrated through several case studies that reveal how mythic narratives shaped perceptions of the past. One of the most prominent examples is Stonehenge, which was widely explained in medieval Britain through legendary accounts rather than empirical reasoning. Fourteenth-century chronicles influenced by Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century narrative attributed the monument’s construction to the wizard Merlin, who was believed to have transported the massive stones through magical intervention (Geoffrey of Monmouth, 1966; Thomas, 1991) [17, 36]. Similar mythic framings appeared in the exploration of burial mounds and ruined temples across Europe, where early excavations—often undertaken out of curiosity or treasure-seeking motives—interpreted these structures as the work of giants, ancient kings, or supernatural

beings (Flint, 1991) ^[14]. Such interpretations reflected the broader medieval assumption that earlier populations possessed extraordinary physical strength, immense wealth, or exceptional abilities, far surpassing those of contemporary societies (Le Goff, 1988) ^[21]. These case studies highlight how medieval encounters with monumental architecture and ancient material culture were framed by symbolic, theological, and heroic narratives rather than historical analysis, thereby shaping how the past was understood prior to the rise of scientific archaeology.

Conclusion

These activities did not in any way establish the necessary foundations for a systematic study of the past. Nevertheless, during the Medieval period, the various engagements with history in Europe contributed to forming the conceptual background that later enabled the development of scientific thought (Le Goff, 1988) ^[21]. As a whole, the Medieval era can be characterized as a time in which understandings of human history were predominantly entrusted to divine authority. Interpretations of the past were situated within an idealized and theologically defined temporal framework, reflecting the Church's overarching influence on intellectual life (Southern, 1990) ^[33]. However, the rigid medieval worldview gradually began to transform as new scientific discoveries challenged long-held theological assumptions. With the rise of Renaissance humanism, long-standing medieval interpretations of the past were re-evaluated, and empirical inquiry gained prominence (Burke, 1998) ^[4]. These changing perspectives created the intellectual space necessary for the emergence of modern scientific approaches to history and archaeology. This process of transformation unfolded across three major cultural periods late Medieval thought, Renaissance humanism, and early modern scientific inquiry and by the sixteenth century CE, these developments had spread widely across Europe (Trigger, 2006) ^[37]. The cumulative effect of these shifts marked a profound departure from the medieval theological model of history toward a more evidence-based and analytical understanding of the human past. This study demonstrates that medieval perceptions of the past were shaped by a complex interplay of theological authority, mythic imagination, and emerging empirical curiosity. From the 5th to the 15th century AD, understandings of antiquity were framed predominantly within Christian cosmology, which positioned divine creation, moral decline, and sacred chronology as the central interpretive structures for explaining the origins and development of human history. The Church exerted immense influence over historical interpretation, embedding world events within a divinely ordained temporal framework and discouraging alternative explanations that challenged Scriptural accounts (Southern, 1990) ^[33]. As a result, monumental structures and ancient material remains were often attributed to giants, supernatural beings, or heroic ancestors, reflecting symbolic rather than analytical engagements with the past (Duby, 1980; Le Goff, 1988) ^[11, 21]. Early excavations of burial sites and monumental ruins therefore emerged not from scholarly intention but from curiosity, treasure-seeking, or the desire to understand extraordinary remnants of earlier societies. Despite these theological constraints, the medieval period also laid critical conceptual groundwork for the later development of archaeology. Gradual intellectual shifts, particularly in the late Middle Ages, encouraged more observational

approaches to ancient remains. Practices such as mapping, recording, and documenting architectural features reflected a slow transition toward empirical inquiry (Trigger, 2006) ^[37]. Antiquarian interests among elites, exemplified by figures such as Charlemagne, Frederick Barbarossa, and later Cyriac of Ancona, further contributed to the emerging recognition of the past as a subject suitable for systematic study. These developments, though limited in methodological rigor, signaled an important departure from purely mythic interpretations and paved the way for Renaissance humanism, which embraced critical scholarship, textual analysis, and evidence-based reasoning (Burke, 1998) ^[4]. By the sixteenth century, the cumulative impact of these intellectual transformations created the foundation for modern archaeological thought. The weakening of ecclesiastical control, alongside scientific advancements in geology, natural history, and evolutionary theory, fundamentally reoriented how scholars conceptualized human antiquity. Darwin's evolutionary framework and early scientific excavations further accelerated the shift from theological to empirical models of understanding the past. Thus, while medieval thought did not produce archaeology in its modern sense, it played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual conditions that made scientific archaeology possible. The transition from myth, theology, and symbolism to systematic observation and analysis represents one of the most significant transformations in Western intellectual history. Understanding medieval imaginaries of the past therefore offers essential insight into the origins of archaeological reasoning and the broader evolution of historical consciousness.

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