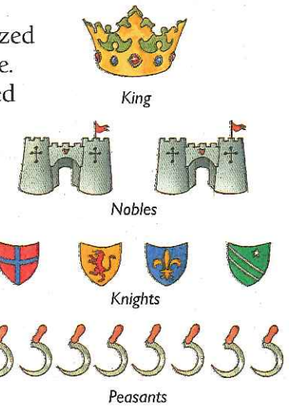
Kings, Nobles and Peasants

Life was very organized in medieval Europe. People were divided into four main groups and each group had different jobs to do. This way of life is now called the feudal system.



This diagram shows the four main groups in the feudal system.

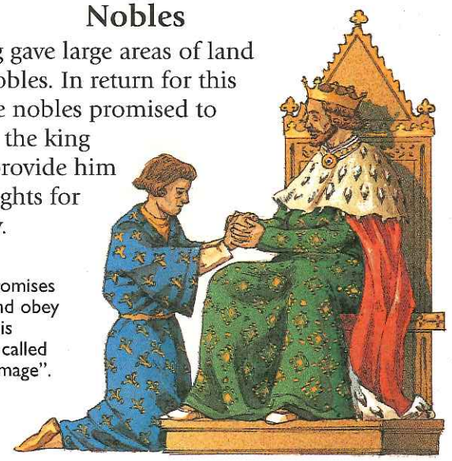
Kings

At the top of the feudal system was the king. He owned all the land in a country, made the laws and led the country's army.

A king being crowned

Nobles

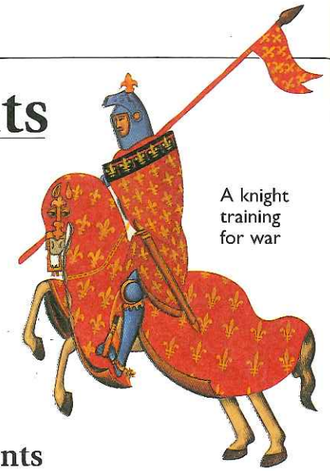
The king gave large areas of land to his nobles. In return for this land, the nobles promised to fight for the king and to provide him with knights for his army.



A noble promises to serve and obey his king. This promise is called "paying homage".

Knights

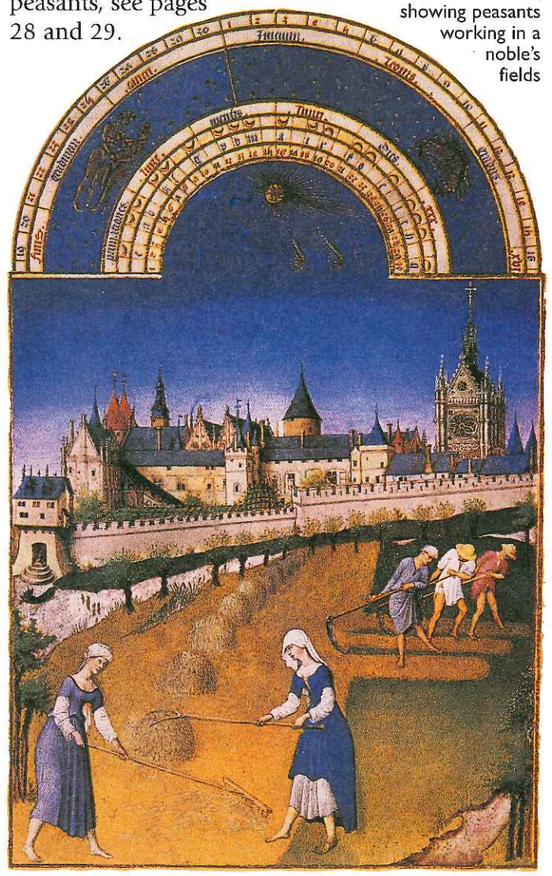
Nobles gave land to their knights as payment for their help in battle. Knights trained for war and fought for nobles and kings.



A knight training for war

Peasants

Peasants farmed the land of the knights, nobles and kings. In return, the landowners protected the peasants from enemy attacks. To find out more about peasants, see pages 28 and 29.



Part of a medieval calendar, showing peasants working in a noble's fields

The people rebel

In spite of their promises to serve and obey, nobles sometimes rebelled against their king, and peasants led revolts against their lords.

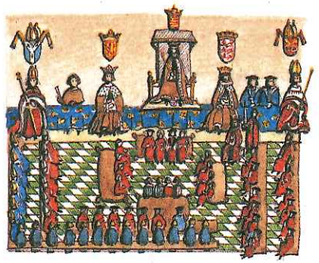
King John and his barons

King John of England was a strong king with a fierce temper. He kept his nobles (called barons) under tight control, but in 1215 they rebelled. The barons made John sign an agreement called Magna Carta. This said that the king had to talk to a council of barons and bishops before he made any big decisions.

King John

The birth of Parliament

In 1275, English knights and townsmen joined the barons and bishops in a new council, known as Parliament. Over the next hundred years, several councils like this were created to control the kings of Europe.

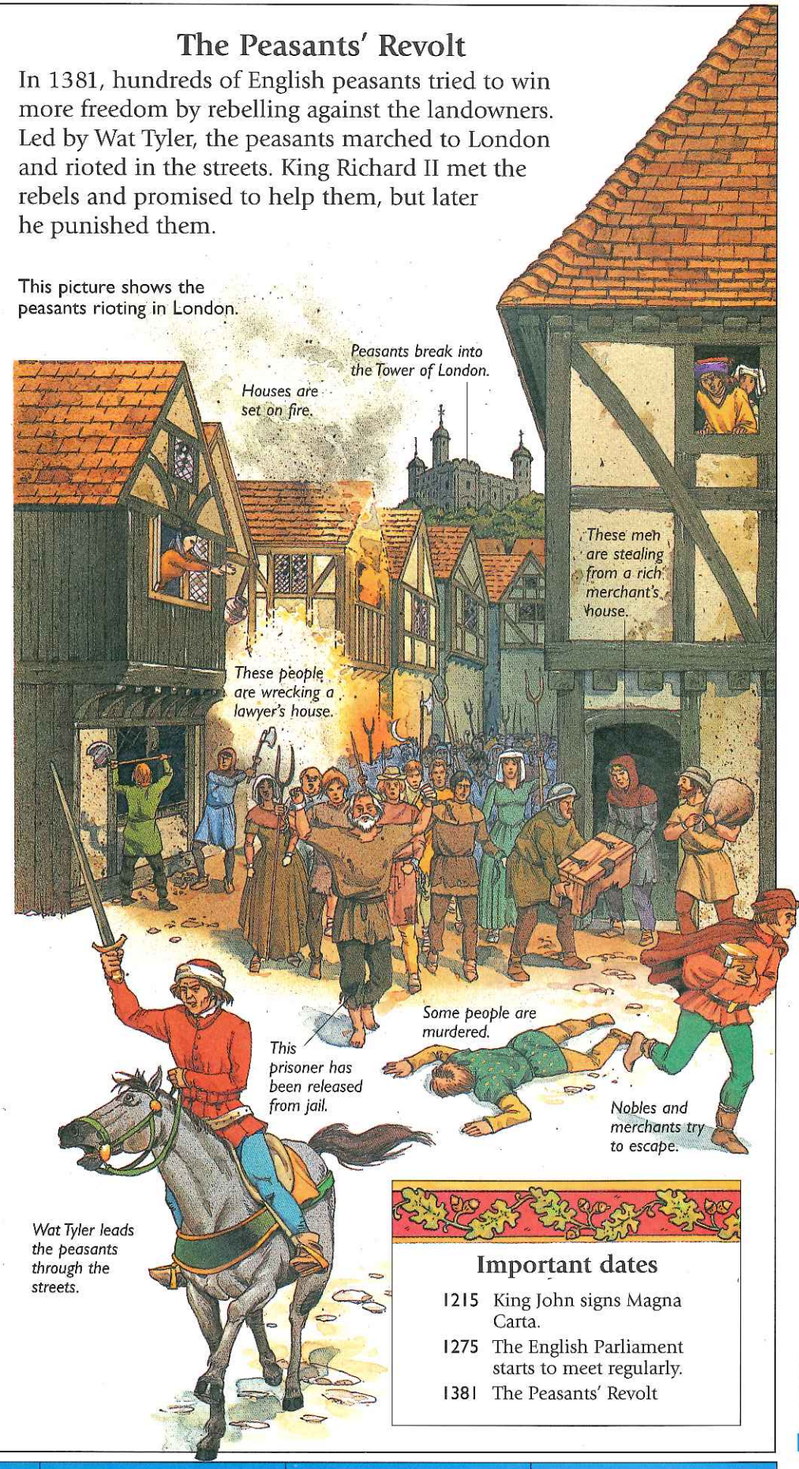


A meeting of Parliament

The Peasants' Revolt

In 1381, hundreds of English peasants tried to win more freedom by rebelling against the landowners. Led by Wat Tyler, the peasants marched to London and rioted in the streets. King Richard II met the rebels and promised to help them, but later he punished them.

This picture shows the peasants rioting in London.



Important dates

1215	King John signs Magna Carta.
1275	The English Parliament starts to meet regularly.
1381	The Peasants' Revolt

Knights, Soldiers and War

Foot soldiers defending a castle

During the Middle Ages, people had to be prepared for war at any time. Kings and nobles built castles to protect themselves from their enemies, knights and foot soldiers trained for war, and armies fought battles at home and abroad.

Defending a castle

A castle could be attacked by foreign invaders or by an enemy lord. Castles were designed to be extremely strong and easy to defend.

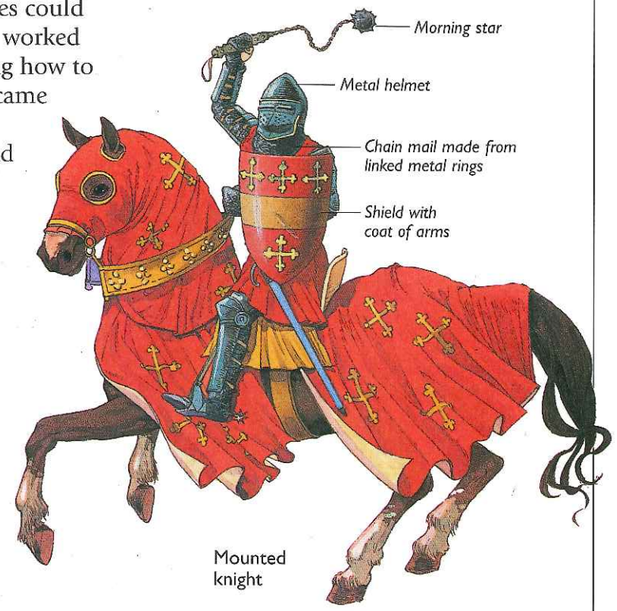
This picture shows an army attacking a castle.

Becoming a knight

A noble knighting a squire

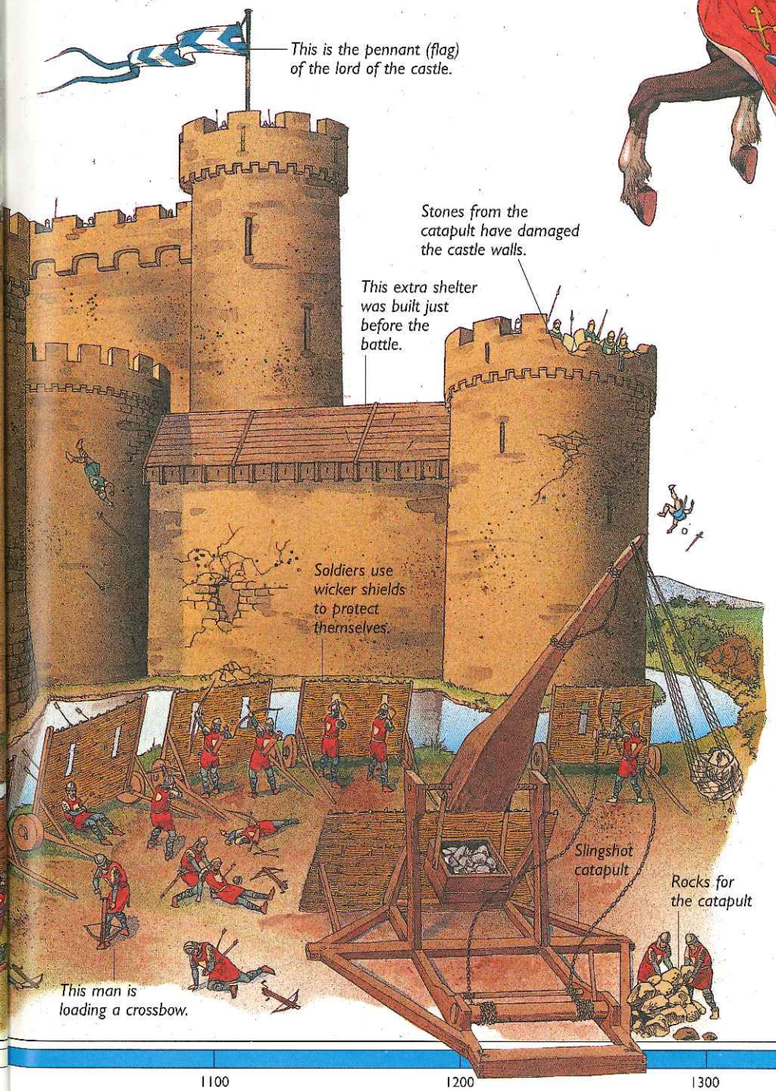
Only boys from noble families could become knights. First, a boy worked as a page in a castle, learning how to ride and fight. Then, he became a squire and looked after a knight. When the squire had proved that he was a brave warrior, he was knighted by a king or a noble.

Knights in battle



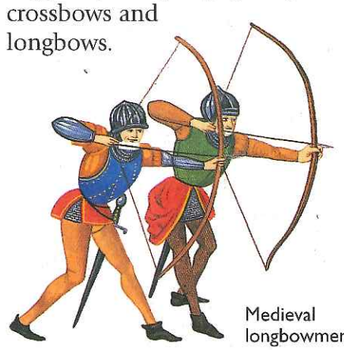
Mounted knight

Knights fought on horseback, using swords, lances (long poles), axes, and vicious weapons called morning stars. Each knight wore a symbol, called a coat of arms, to show which family he belonged to.



Foot soldiers

Foot soldiers served their lord by guarding his castle and fighting for him. They fought with daggers, pikes (long spears), crossbows and longbows.

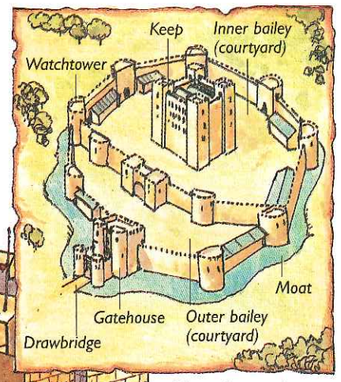


Medieval longbowmen

Living in a Castle

Kings and nobles lived in castles with their families, their servants and their soldiers. In times of peace, the lord of the castle managed his lands, kept law and order, and held feasts and tournaments.

This cutaway picture shows the central keep (tower) of a castle.



Plan of a castle

These guards are looking out for enemies.

This bedroom belongs to the lord and his lady.

This is a private room for the lord's family. It is called the solar.

Chapel

This man is baking bread in an oven.

The castle guards eat here.

Great hall

Stables

Garderobe (toilet)

Kitchen

Blacksmith

Well

Knife grinder

Dungeon

Food is kept cool in the storeroom.

Entrance

Doves are kept in the dovecote.

500 600 700 800 900

Hunting

Kings and nobles often went hunting in the countryside around their castles. They rode on horseback with packs of hounds, and hunted deer, wild boar, bears and wolves.

King John hunting deer

Falconry

Falconry was a popular sport in the Middle Ages. Lords and ladies had their own falcons and hawks, which were trained by falconers to catch small animals and birds.

Falconers

Pastimes

Nobles and their families enjoyed dancing, singing and playing musical instruments. They played games, such as chess, and ladies worked on fine embroidery.

A game of chess

Feasting

Lavish feasts were held in the great hall of a noble's castle. Pages served rich food and wine, jesters told jokes, and minstrels played their instruments and sang. Many different courses were served, and a feast could last for hours.

This picture shows a feast in a castle.

Heralds will play their trumpets when the next course arrives.

The lord and lady sit under a canopy.

This is the high table. The most important guests sit here.

This man tastes the lord's food, to make sure it has not been poisoned.

The guests eat with their fingers.

Roast swan

Boar's head

This dessert is called a subtlety. It is made mainly from marzipan.

Salted fish on a pewter dish

Slices of stale bread are used for plates.

Minstrel

Jester

Tournaments

Tournaments, or mock battles, were often held in the castle grounds. The most popular sport at a tournament was jousting. In a joust, two knights charged at each other and each knight tried to knock his opponent to the ground.

This knight has dropped his lance and his shield.

The horses are called chargers.

Knights jousting at a tournament

1100 1200 1300 1400 1500

Living in a Village

A peasant sowing seed

During the Middle Ages, most people lived in villages. A knight, known as the lord of the manor, owned all the land around a village and the peasants had to earn the right to farm some of his land. Some peasants were freemen, who paid money or food for their land, but others, called villeins, had to work part-time for their lord.

This picture shows a medieval village.

The fields are divided into strips.

A nobleman lives in this castle.

The lord of the manor lives in the manor house.

The lord of the manor is going hunting.

This is the pound where stray animals are kept. Their owners must pay to get them out.

The villagers keep their animals on a piece of land called a common.

Village green

This man is locked in the stocks as a punishment.

Inn

Stable

This man is fishing.

Well

This man is cutting wheat with a sickle.

Blacksmith

Carpenters

These people are taking wool, eggs and cheese to sell in a nearby town.

Farming

Most villages had three large fields. One was planted with wheat and one with barley. The third field was left fallow (unplanted), so it would be fit for planting the next year. Each field was divided into strips for different families to farm. A family would have several strips in each of the three fields.

Other jobs

All the villagers worked on the land, but some, like the miller and the blacksmith, did other jobs as well. People gave them food in return for their work.

The miller grinds the villagers' grain in this windmill.

Church

Priest's house

Thatcher

This woman is spinning wool.

Vegetable garden

Beehives

Village homes

Peasants lived in simple cottages with bare floors and no glass in the windows. They had to share their home with their animals.

This cottage has been cut away so you can see inside.

Food for the winter is stored in the roof.

Hole for smoke

Thatched roof

Timber frame

Tools

Cooking pot

Stable

Stone fireplace

Clothes chest

People sleep on straw mattresses.

The walls are made from wattle-and-daub (twigs covered with mud and straw).

A woman milking a cow

Food

People ate bread, porridge, fruit, vegetables and stew, washed down with watery beer. Eggs, meat and fish were luxuries. Some families kept a cow and made cheese, but they sold most of their cheese at the local market.

Fairs

At least once a year, a fair was held on the village green. Merchants came to buy and sell goods, people played games and held wrestling matches, and entertainers amused the crowds.

Acrobats

These men are wrestling.

Juggler

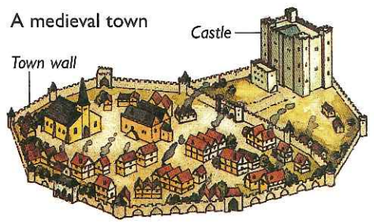
This man has trained a bear to dance.

A village fair

Living in a Town

By the year 1100, small towns were starting to appear all over Europe. Many of these towns were built beside a castle. People living in a town paid rent to the lord of the castle, but they did not have to work for him and they could choose how to earn their living.

A medieval town



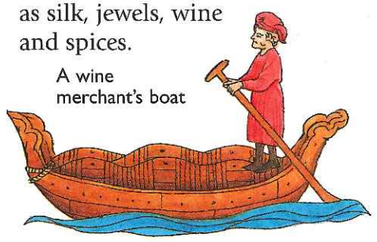
Craftworkers

Many craftworkers set up workshops in the towns. They made useful things, such as clothes, pots and pans, which they sold to the townspeople and to farmers who visited the towns.

Dyers dyeing cloth

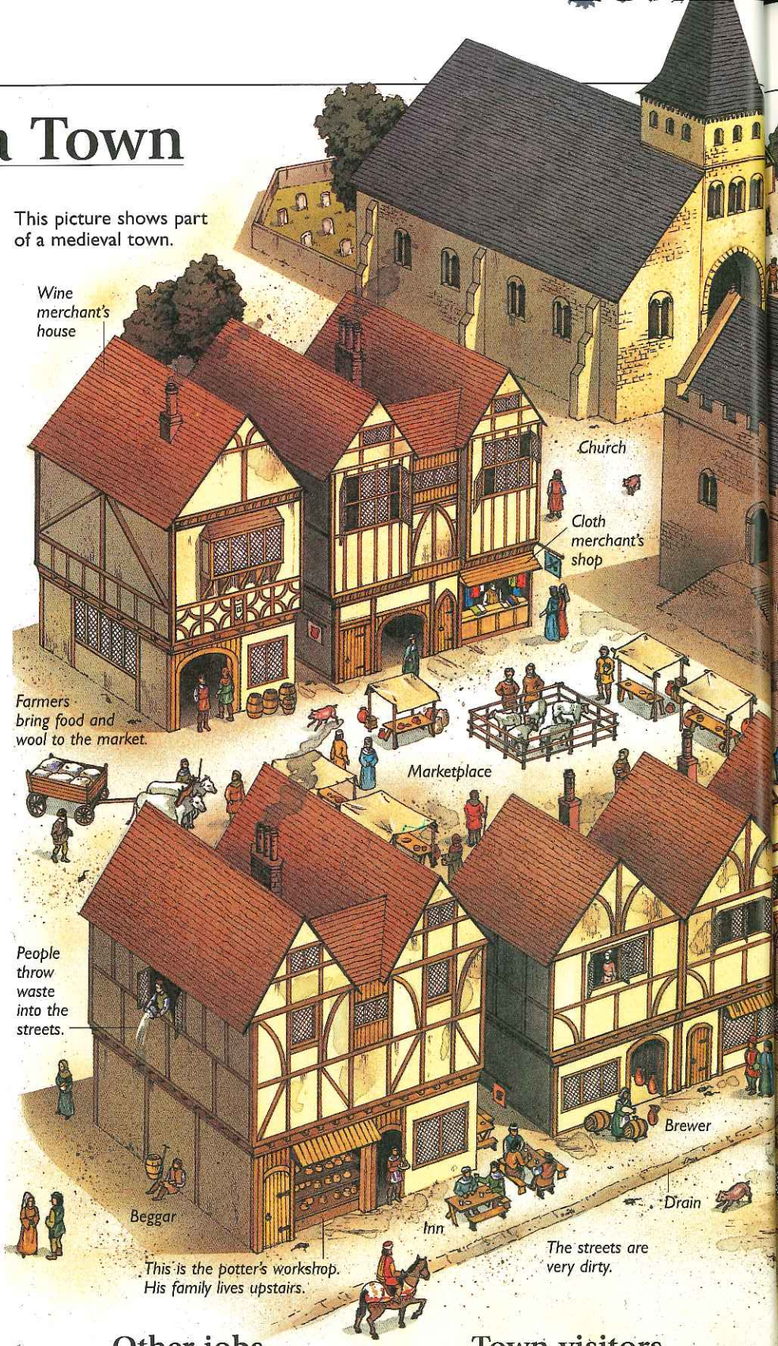
Merchants

Merchants sold wool, wood and iron to the craftworkers. They also sold luxury goods from foreign lands, such as silk, jewels, wine and spices.



A wine merchant's boat

This picture shows part of a medieval town.

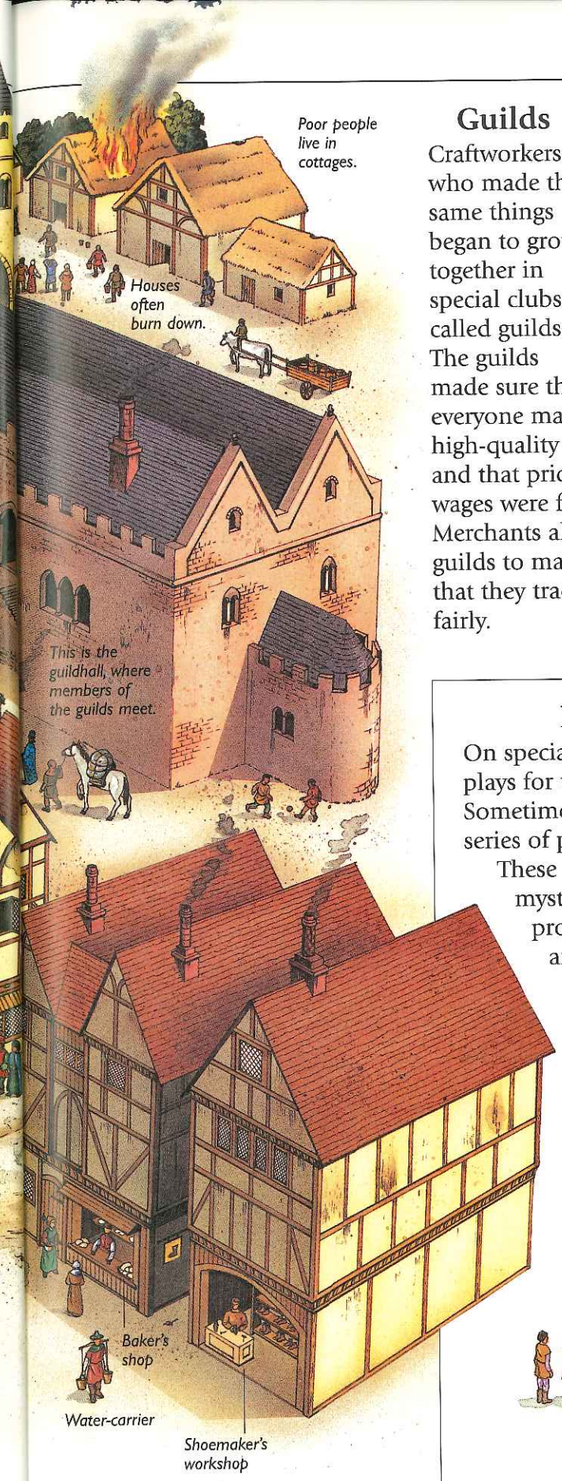


Other jobs

Bakers, butchers and brewers provided food and drink for the townspeople. Innkeepers ran taverns, and priests and doctors came to work in the towns.

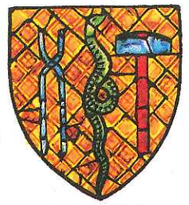
Town visitors

Farmers and traders came to the towns to buy and sell goods. Everyone who visited a town had to pay money, called a toll, before they were allowed in.



Guilds

Craftworkers who made the same things began to group together in special clubs, called guilds. The guilds made sure that everyone made high-quality goods and that prices and wages were fair. Merchants also had guilds to make sure that they traded fairly.



Blacksmiths' guild badge

Joining a guild

Most members of guilds were men. Before a man could join a guild, he had to work for seven years as an apprentice to a master craftsman. Then he made his "masterpiece". If it was good enough, he joined the guild as a journeyman. Only a few journeymen became masters.

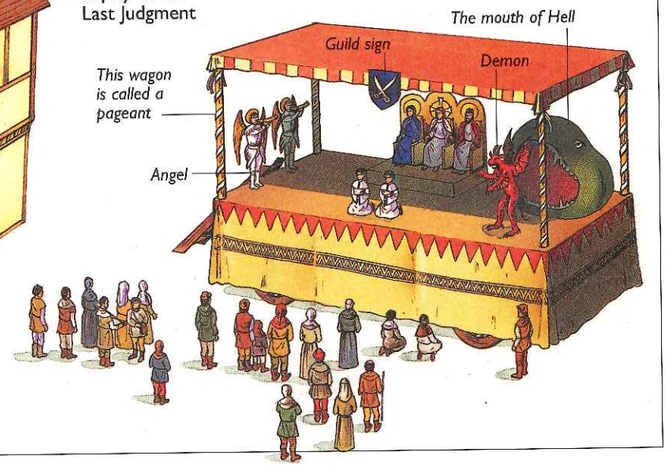
A master testing his apprentices

Holy days and mystery plays

On special holy days, the guilds put on plays for the people of the town. Sometimes, they performed a long series of plays based on Bible stories. These plays became known as mystery plays, because they were produced by craftworkers, and the medieval word for craft was "maisterie".

A scene from a play of Saint George and the dragon

A play of the Last Judgment



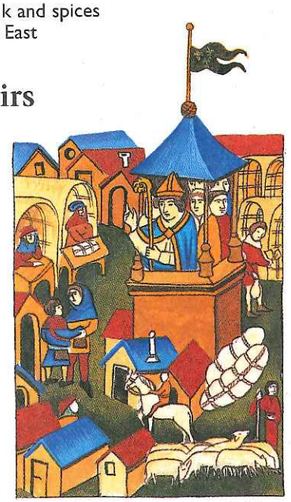
Traders and Towns

By the 1300s, people in Europe could buy luxuries such as silk, jewels, sugar and spices. The merchants of Europe traded with Arab and Turkish merchants, who sold goods from places as far away as India, Africa and China.

Jewels, silk and spices from the East

Trade fairs

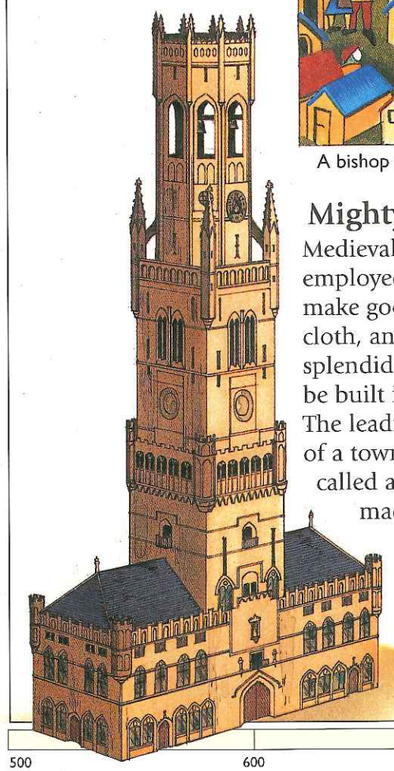
Several times a year, merchants from all over Europe met at trade fairs to buy and sell goods. The towns where the fairs were held became very rich.



A bishop blessing a trade fair

Mighty merchants

Medieval merchants employed workers to make goods, such as cloth, and paid for splendid buildings to be built in their towns. The leading merchants of a town met in a group, called a council, and made decisions about the way their town was run.

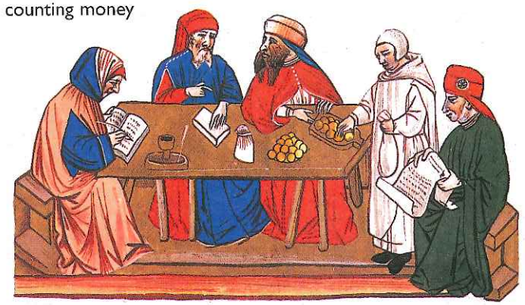


The cloth merchants of Bruges paid for this market hall.

Merchant bankers

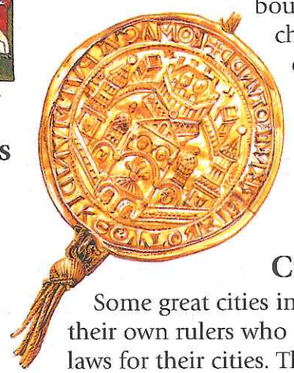
As trade increased, many people needed to borrow money to buy goods. A group of merchants from Lombardy in northern Italy created the first bank, and other Italians soon set up banks all over Europe.

Merchant bankers counting money



Buying freedom

At first, townspeople paid rent to their local lord, but, as the towns grew richer, people wanted to be independent. In many towns, the people bought a document called a charter from their lord. The charter was stamped with the lord's seal to show that he had handed over his rights to the townspeople.



A seal on a town charter

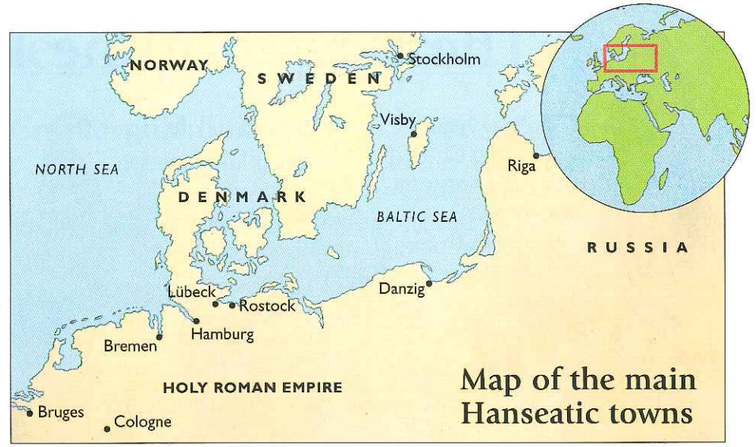
City-states

Some great cities in Italy and Germany had their own rulers who lived in palaces and made laws for their cities. These independent cities were known as city-states.

Venice was one of the richest city-states.

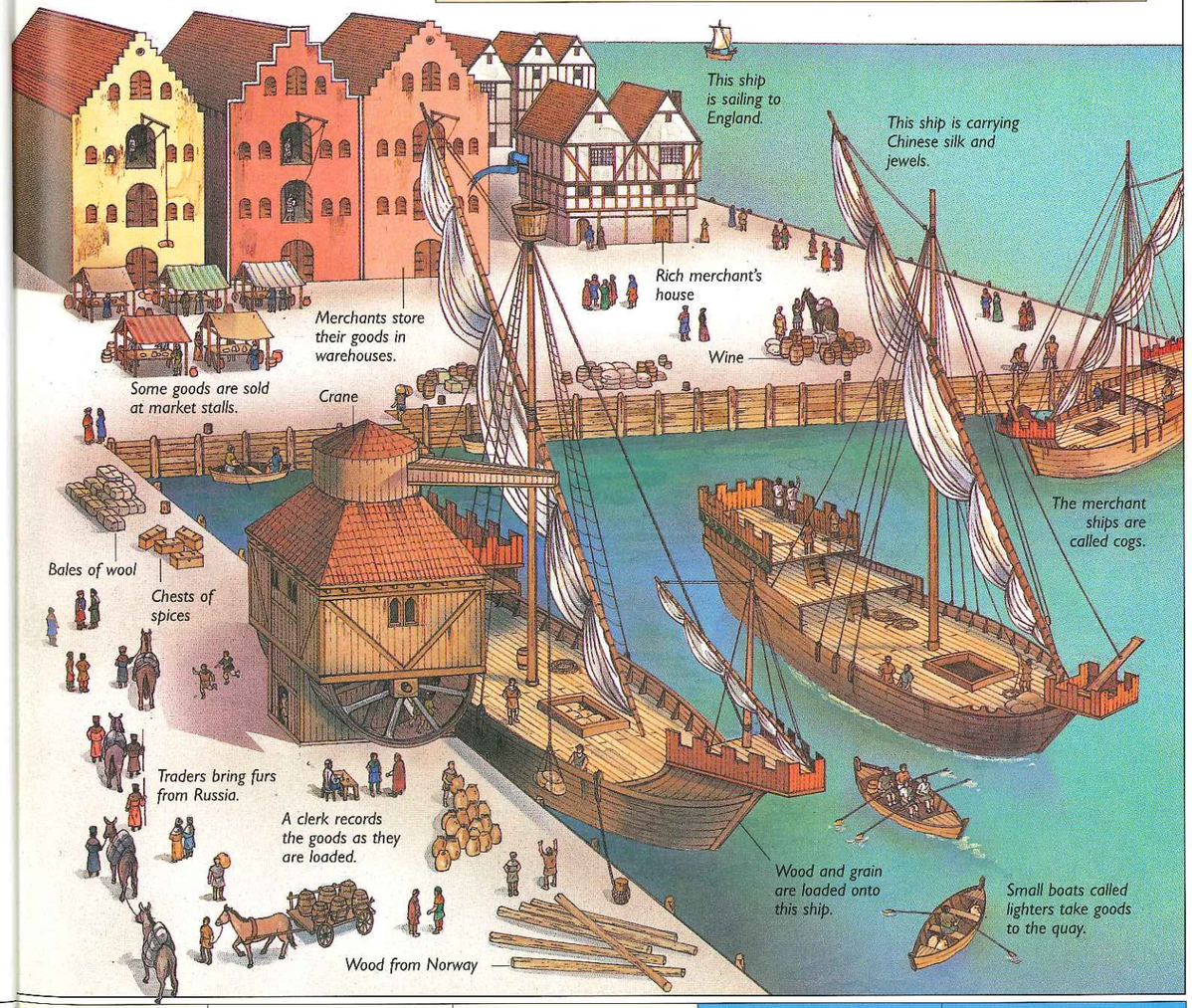
The Hanseatic League

Some of the busiest trading towns in Europe were grouped around the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. These towns formed a club, or "hansa", later known as the Hanseatic League. By 1350, there were over 70 towns in the league. All the towns helped each other and followed strict trading rules.



Map of the main Hanseatic towns

This picture shows a busy port in a Hanseatic town.



The Power of the Popes

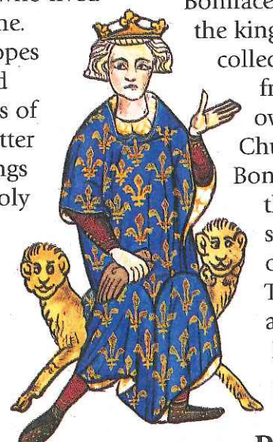
A medieval pope

The head of the Church in western Europe was the Pope, who lived in Rome. The popes wanted power over the rulers of Europe. They had bitter quarrels with the kings of France and the Holy Roman emperors. (See page 19 to find out more about the Holy Roman Empire.)

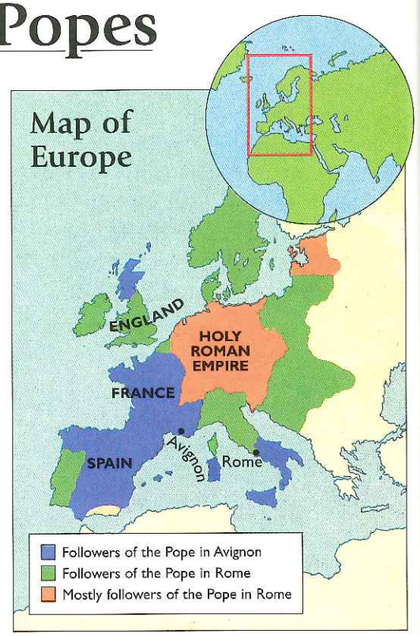
Pope and king

A French king, known as Philip the Fair, argued with Pope Boniface VIII over the king's right to collect taxes from lands owned by the Church. In 1303, Boniface announced that he had supreme power over all other rulers. This made Philip so angry that he took Boniface prisoner.

Pope Boniface



King Philip the Fair



Pope and emperor

The popes and the Holy Roman emperors both wanted to control all the bishops in the Holy Roman Empire. This led to fierce arguments. In 1077, Pope Gregory VII made Emperor Henry IV wait barefoot in the snow for three days, before he would forgive him.

Popes in France

In 1309, a French pope moved to Avignon in southern France. The popes stayed in France for a hundred years, and, for part of this time, rival popes ruled in Rome. Some countries followed the Avignon Pope and others supported the Pope in Rome (see map). This split in the Church was called the Great Schism.

This picture shows a procession in the city of Avignon.

Enemies of the Church

In the Middle Ages, it was very dangerous to behave differently from the way the leaders of the Church expected. Anyone who questioned the Church's teachings was punished severely, people who acted strangely were accused of witchcraft, and Jews were cruelly persecuted.

Persecuting Jews

Jews had to wear special clothes so they could be recognized. They were attacked and killed all over Europe, and were driven out of England, France and Spain.

A medieval Jew

Trying witches

Suspected witches were given very unfair trials, such as trial by water. If they floated, they were guilty, and if they sank, they were innocent.

A suspected witch

Hounding heretics

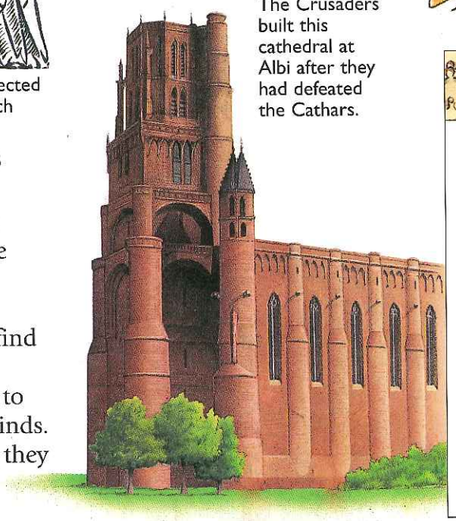
People who questioned the teachings of the Church were called heretics. The popes sent out monks, called inquisitors, to find heretics and persuade them to change their minds. If they refused, they were tortured or killed.

Heretics being burned to death

Crusaders and Cathars

Crusader knights attacking a Cathar city

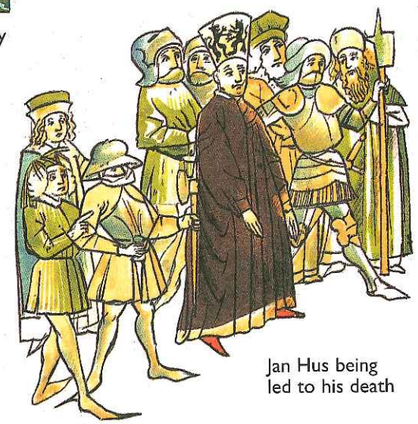
The Cathars were heretics who believed that the world was evil. Their ideas spread rapidly through southern France and this frightened Pope Innocent III. Innocent started a war, called the Albigensian Crusade, which did not end until all the Cathars were wiped out.



The Crusaders built this cathedral at Albi after they had defeated the Cathars.

Preacher power

Jan Hus was a Czech preacher who attacked the power of the Pope and said that people should read the Bible for themselves. He was arrested and burned to death as a heretic. After his death, his supporters, called Hussites, rebelled against the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor. The fighting lasted for 17 years and the Hussites won many towns in eastern Europe.



Jan Hus being led to his death

Important dates

1210-1229	The Albigensian Crusade
c.1230	Popes begin to use inquisitors.
1290	Jews are driven out of England.
1306	Jews are driven out of France.
1309-1417	Popes in Avignon
c.1372-1415	The life of Jan Hus
1378-1417	Popes in Avignon and Rome (the Great Schism)
1419-1436	The Hussite wars
1492	Jews are driven out of Spain.

Building a Cathedral

A bishop

Medieval bishops and archbishops gave orders that vast cathedrals should be built to show the glory of God. Most cathedrals took over a century to build. They were beautifully decorated with carvings, statues and stained-glass windows.

Stories in glass

Stained-glass windows in cathedrals and churches showed scenes from the Bible. Preachers used these pictures to teach people who could not read.

Window showing a scene from the story of Noah's Ark

This picture shows a cathedral being built.

Spire

Wooden scaffolding

A machine called a winch lifts blocks of stone.

The roof is covered with sheets of lead.

Sometimes, workers fall and are killed.

Workshop

Carpenters make benches for priests to sit on.

The architect is showing the bishop a stained-glass window.

These men are mixing mortar (cement).

The master mason tells the workmen what to do.

Stone cutters

Stone carver

Sculptors

500 700 800 900

Going on a Pilgrimage

A pilgrim

During the Middle Ages, many Christians went on religious journeys called pilgrimages. They became pilgrims to show their love for God, and because they hoped that God would forgive their sins and cure their diseases.

Pilgrim routes

Pilgrims journeyed to holy places, called shrines, where saints were buried or sacred objects were kept. Many people made the journey to Jerusalem or Rome, and pilgrims flocked to Compostela in Spain, to visit the shrine of Saint James, the patron saint of pilgrims.

Saint James

Canterbury pilgrims

In England, pilgrims went to Canterbury to pray at the grave of Saint Thomas Becket, an archbishop who was murdered by the knights of King Henry II.

The murder of Thomas Becket

Pilgrims' tales

Although the pilgrims' journeys were difficult and dangerous, they could also be fun. In the medieval poem "The Canterbury Tales", pilgrims tell each other stories as they travel along.

This picture shows pilgrims on their way to Canterbury.

Pilgrims stop at inns to eat and sleep.

Monks

Nuns

Sometimes, robbers attack the pilgrims.

This man is telling a story.

Sick child

Some people sing hymns.

This man is selling badges to pilgrims.

Rich people ride on horseback.

A priest preaches to the pilgrims.

This woman hopes that she will be cured.

This man is barefoot to show that he is sorry for his sins.

1100 1200 1300 1400 1500

Monks and Monasteries

A monk and a nun

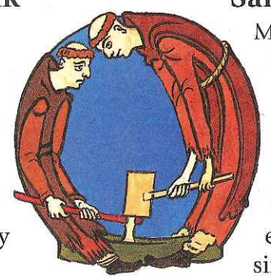
Many Christians in the Middle Ages chose to serve God by becoming monks or nuns. They lived apart from the rest of the world in monasteries for men and convents for women. Monks and nuns prayed regularly, followed strict rules, and had special work to do each day.

This picture shows a monastery. Some of the walls have been cut away so you can see inside.

Monks praying in their chapel

Becoming a monk

Monks had to promise to give up everything they owned, to obey their abbot (chief monk), and not to get married. Before a man made these promises, he joined the monastery as a novice, learning its rules and getting used to its way of life.



Monks splitting wood

Saint Benedict's rules

Medieval monks followed rules that were written by Saint Benedict in the 6th century. He said that monks should pray, study, and work hard in the fields. They should eat plain food, wear simple clothes (called habits) and look after the sick and the poor.

Healing the sick

The monks grew herbs in their monastery gardens and used them to treat people who were sick. They kept careful records of which herbs worked, and became experts at making medicines.

Monks preparing medicines

Making manuscripts

Unlike most people in the Middle Ages, many monks could read and write. They made handwritten books, called manuscripts, and decorated them with pictures and patterns.

A decorated letter in a manuscript

Wealth and power

Rich people gave money and land to the monks, and many monasteries became very wealthy. Some monks stopped living a simple life, and instead of praying and working hard, they spent their time running their lands, and enjoying a life of luxury.

A monk greedily helping himself to a drink.

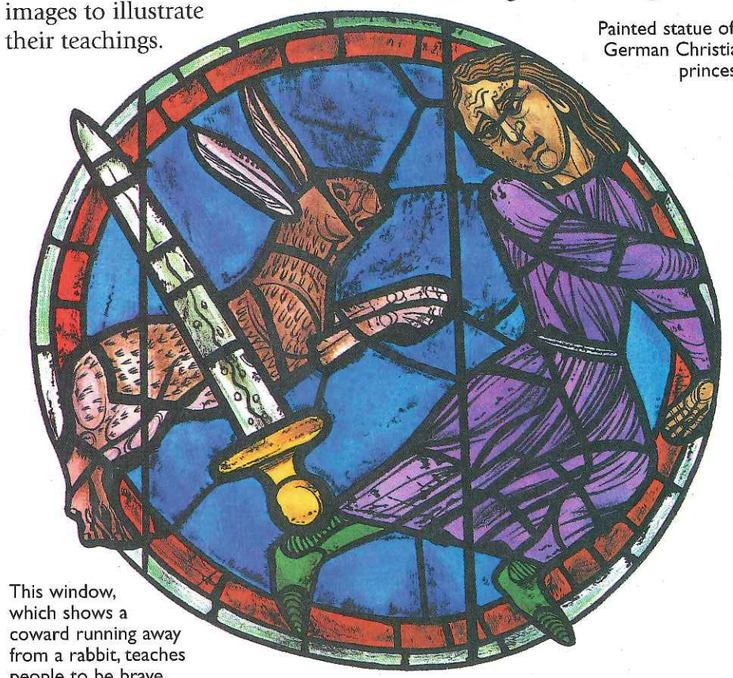
Art in the Middle Ages

Most men and women in medieval Europe could not read, but they learned a lot by looking at pictures. People learned about Christianity from the paintings, carvings and stained-glass windows in their local church, and preachers used these images to illustrate their teachings.

Pictures in churches

Medieval churches were filled with images. Even the smallest churches had vivid paintings on their walls and simple carvings inside and out. Large churches and cathedrals were decorated with stunning stained-glass windows, delicate carvings and striking statues.

Painted statue of a German Christian princess.



This window, which shows a coward running away from a rabbit, teaches people to be brave.

Curious carvings

Medieval carvers did not always show religious subjects. High up on church walls, they carved mischievous characters and monsters in stone. Some carvings on the outsides of churches had water spouts sticking out of their mouths. These carvings are known as gargoyles.

Carving of a monster

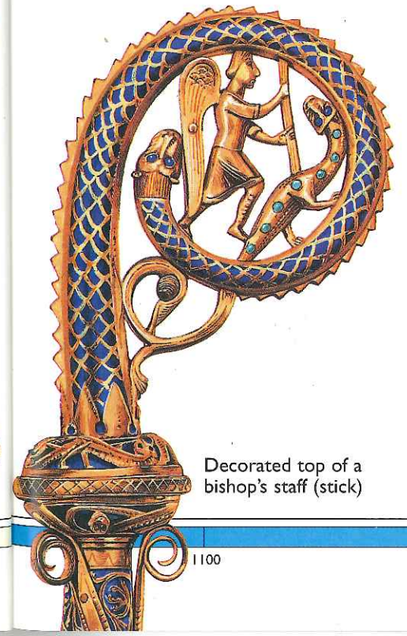
Art for the rich

Wealthy lords and ladies owned their own prayer books and Bibles, which were written by hand and beautifully illustrated. They also hung splendid tapestries on the walls of their castles. Many tapestries showed scenes of castle life.

A huntsman from a tapestry

Golden treasures

Goldsmiths made elaborate objects, such as crowns, goblets, and crosses, and decorated them with precious jewels.



Decorated top of a bishop's staff (stick)

Inspiring images

This 14th-century painting shows the Virgin Mary and Jesus surrounded by angels in heaven. It was probably displayed on an altar (table) in a private chapel.

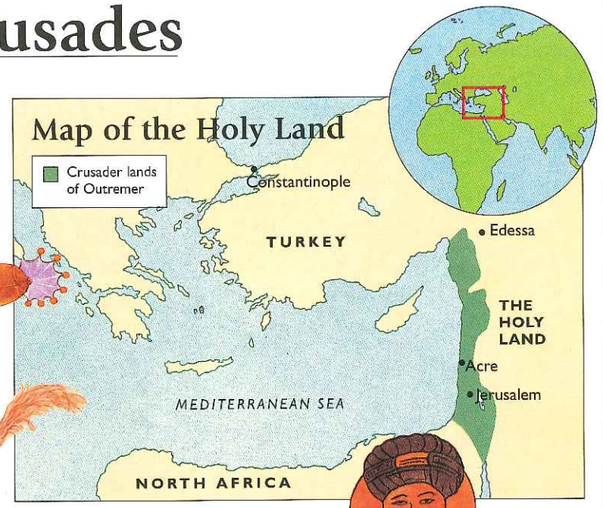
Skilled artists painted beautiful religious pictures on wooden panels. These paintings, known as altarpieces, stood on an altar (table) in a church or chapel, and inspired people to worship.

The artists did not try to make their pictures realistic. Instead, they aimed to create an impression of heaven, by painting glowing scenes with glittering golden backgrounds.

The Crusades

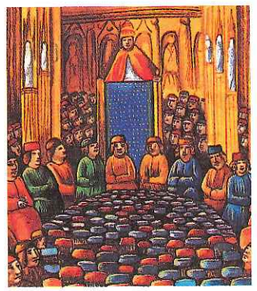
By the 1060s, Palestine, known as the Holy Land, was controlled by Muslim Turks. The Turks threatened Christian visitors to the Holy Land and attacked the Christian Byzantine Empire. When the Turks beat the Byzantines at the Battle of Manzikert (see page 54), Christians everywhere felt their religion was in danger.

A Christian artist's view of a Muslim warrior



The call to battle

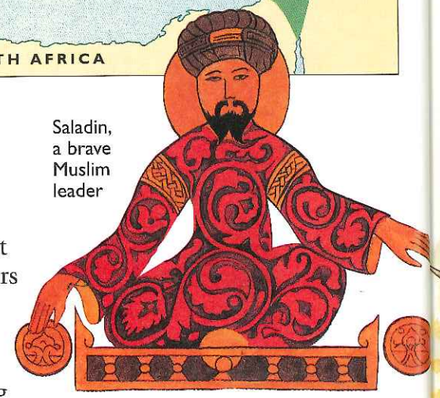
After the Turks' victory, the Byzantine Emperor asked the Christians of western Europe for help. In 1095, Pope Urban II preached a sermon in France. He urged Christians from all over Europe to go on a crusade, or holy war, to drive the Muslims out of the Holy Land.



Pope Urban preaching in France

The First Crusade

Nobles from France, Germany and Italy gathered their armies together and set off for the Holy Land. It took them three years to reach Jerusalem, but in 1099 they captured the city and the surrounding lands. The Crusaders called these lands Outremer, which means "the kingdom across the sea".

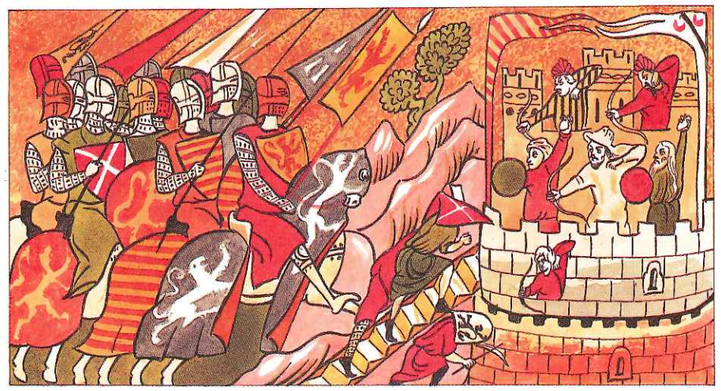


Saladin, a brave Muslim leader

The Muslims fight back

After the First Crusade, many Crusaders went home, leaving Outremer very weak. The Muslims seized the town of Edessa, and a Second Crusade failed to win it back. Under their brave leader, Saladin, the Muslims recaptured Jerusalem.

Muslim soldiers



A battle during the First Crusade

The Third Crusade

The Third Crusade was led by the rulers of England, France and Germany. They won many battles, and captured the city of Acre, but they did not win back Jerusalem.

Crusaders fighting Muslims during the Third Crusade

Crusaders ride heavy horses that are good at charging.

Muslim warriors ride lightweight horses, so they can attack swiftly.

Richard the Lion Heart, King of England, leads his army.

Crusader knights

Groups of knights who were also monks were formed to fight the Muslims. The main groups were the Knights Templar, the Teutonic Knights and the Knights Hospitaller.

A Knight Templar

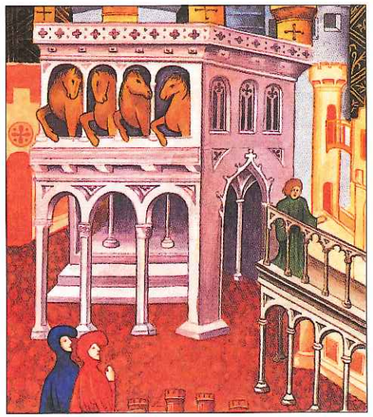
The end of the Crusades

Three more Crusades set out in the next hundred years. In 1229, the Muslims agreed that the Christians could take back Jerusalem, but this agreement did not last. The Muslims continued to win back land and in 1291 they conquered Acre, the last Crusader city.

The Fourth Crusade

The Fourth Crusade only went as far as Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. Although the Crusaders were supposed to be on the same side as the Byzantines, they attacked their city and stole many of its treasures. The Crusaders ruled Constantinople for nearly 60 years.

This picture shows Saint Mark's Cathedral in Venice. The four bronze horses were stolen from Constantinople.



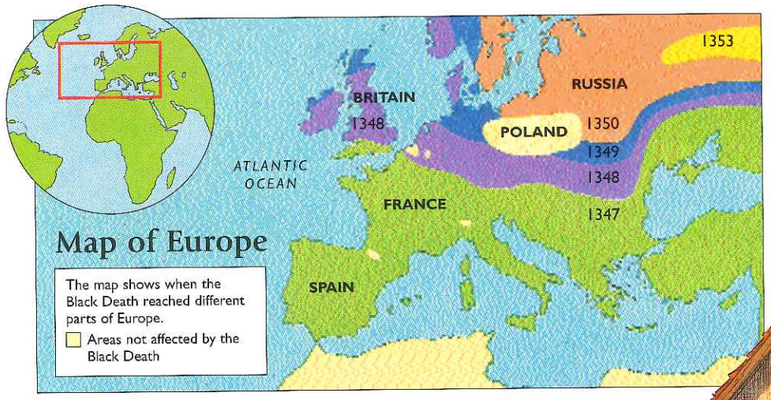
Important dates

1071	The Battle of Manzikert
1096-1099	The First Crusade
1099	The Crusaders capture Jerusalem.
1147-1149	The Second Crusade
1187	The Muslims recapture Jerusalem.
1189-1192	The Third Crusade
1191	The Crusaders capture Acre.
1202-1204	The Fourth Crusade
1204	The Crusaders capture Constantinople.
1229	The Crusaders control Jerusalem.
1244	The Muslims recapture Jerusalem.
1291	The Muslims recapture Acre. The Crusades end.

The Black Death

In 1347, a ship returned to Italy from Asia, bringing with it a terrible plague (disease). The plague was called the Black Death because of the deadly black swellings it caused. In six years, it swept across Europe, killing roughly one in every three people.

A sick sailor being carried ashore



Fatal fleas

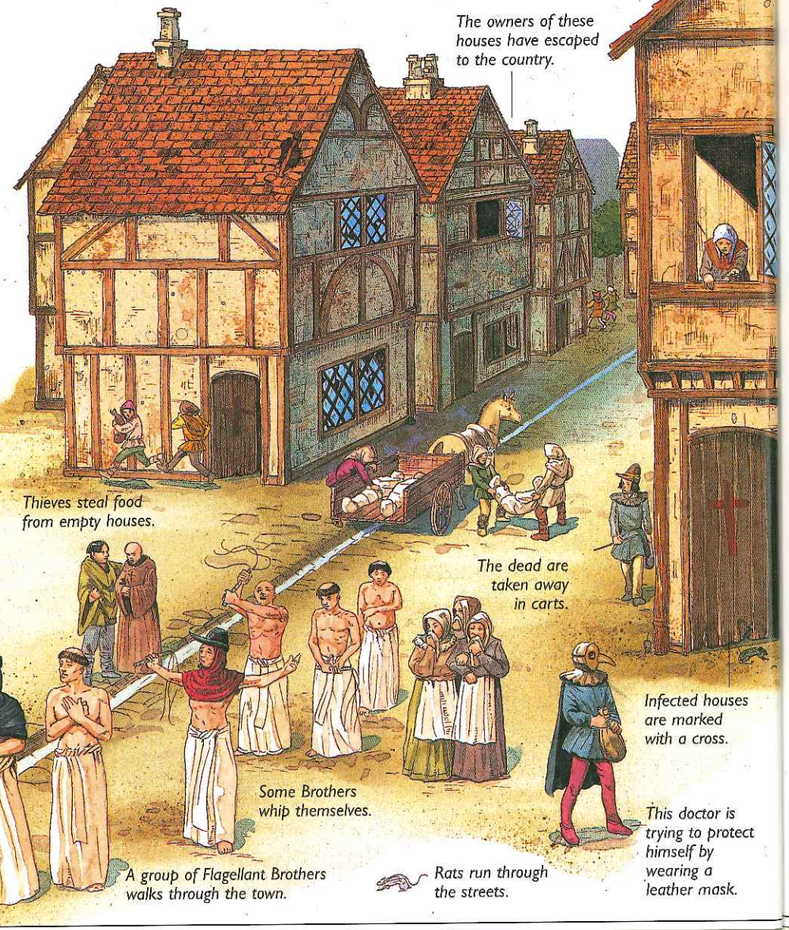
The Black Death was spread by bloodsucking fleas that lived on black rats, but no one realized this. People tried many ways to stop the plague from spreading, but nothing worked.

People burning the clothes of the dead

Punishment from God

Many people thought that God had sent the Black Death as a punishment for their sins. A group of men, called the Flagellant Brothers, tried to stop the disease by whipping their bodies to punish themselves. They went from town to town and actually helped to spread the plague.

This picture shows a town infected with the Black Death.



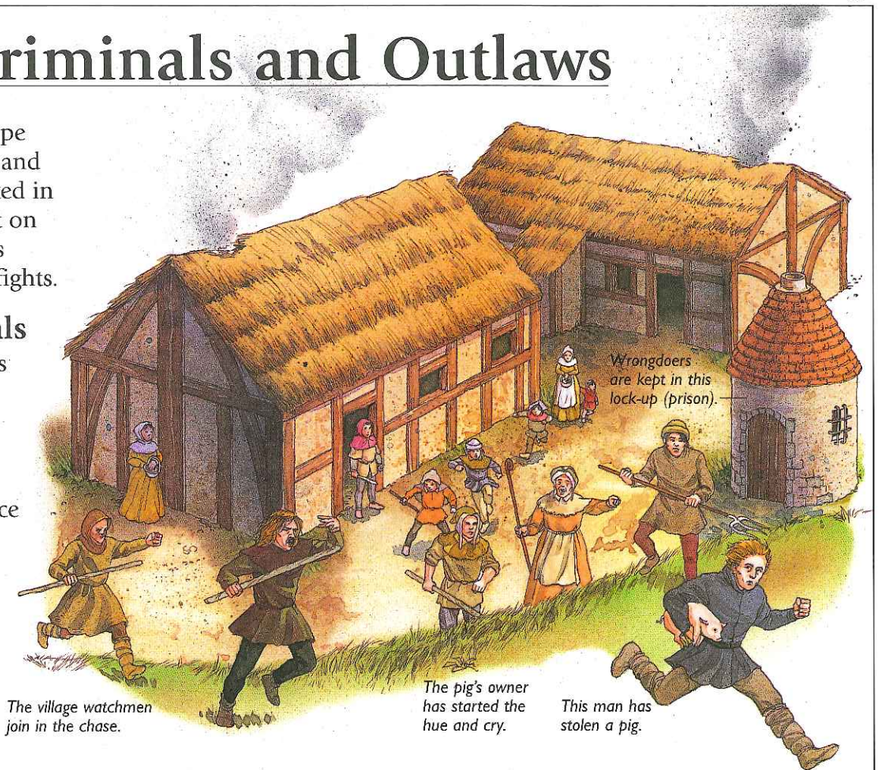
Criminals and Outlaws

Life in medieval Europe could be dangerous and violent. Thieves lurked in towns, robbers lay in wait on lonely roads, and quarrels sometimes led to deadly fights.

Catching criminals

Groups of men took turns being watchmen in their towns and villages, but everyone had the right to catch a criminal. Anyone who saw a crime take place could chase after the wrongdoer, calling out to others to join in. This noisy chase was called a "hue and cry".

This picture shows a hue and cry in a village.



Public punishments

Most punishments were carried out in public, to make people frightened of breaking the law. Wrongdoers could be locked in the stocks, or dragged through the streets and whipped, and people who committed serious crimes were put to death in front of large crowds.

A criminal being dragged through the streets

Harsh laws

There were many harsh laws in the Middle Ages, but some of the most hated were the forest laws. These laws allowed kings and nobles to hunt deer on their own lands, while any peasant who killed a deer was severely punished, and could even be put to death.

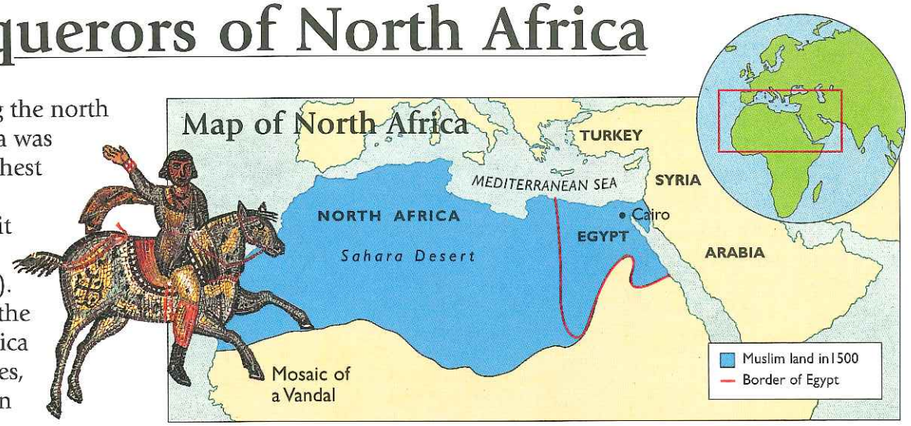
Outlaws

Sometimes, people ran away to escape punishment. These runaways became outlaws and lived in forests. They had no rights and it was not a crime to kill them. Many stories have been written about the famous English outlaw Robin Hood, but no one knows if he really existed.

Statue of Robin Hood

Conquerors of North Africa

The land along the north coast of Africa was one of the richest parts of the Roman Empire, but in 429 it was invaded by the Vandals (see page 6). The Vandals forced the people of North Africa to pay very high taxes, and let many Roman cities fall into ruins.



A Roman villa in North Africa

Byzantine rulers

In 533, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian drove the Vandals out of Africa. For the next 150 years, Byzantine rulers in North Africa tried to bring back the Roman way of life.

Coin showing the Emperor Justinian

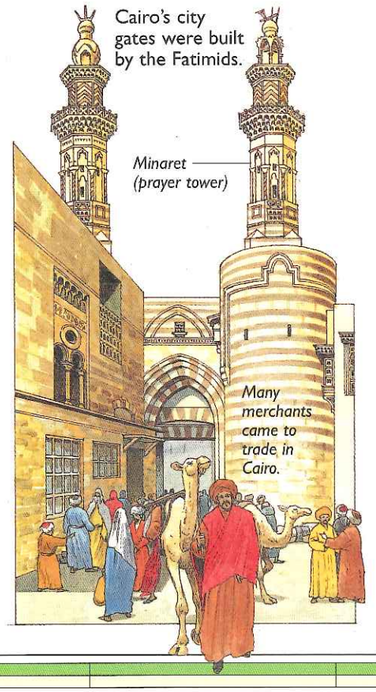
Arab invaders

The Arabs invaded North Africa in 697, and by 750 it had become part of the Muslim Arab Empire. At first, North Africa was controlled by the Arab caliph (ruler), but slowly local rulers set up their own Muslim kingdoms.

Arab invaders

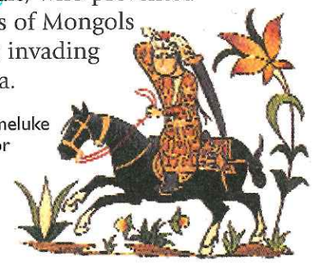
Fatimids in Egypt

In 969, a group of Muslims from Syria, called the Fatimids, seized control of Egypt. They set up an independent kingdom and their capital city, Cairo, became very rich. The Fatimids ruled for 200 years until they were conquered by the Arab leader, Saladin (see page 42).



Mamelukes in Egypt

Saladin's descendants stayed in power for 80 years, but in 1250 the Mamelukes took over. The Mamelukes were Muslim Turks who had once been slaves in Saladin's army. The most famous Mameluke leader was Sultan Baibars, who prevented tribes of Mongols from invading Africa.



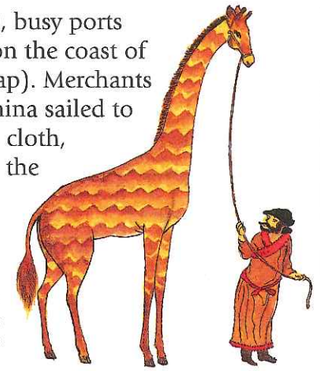
A Mameluke warrior

Important dates

429-533	The Vandals rule North Africa.
533-697	The Byzantines rule North Africa.
697	The Arabs conquer North Africa.
750	North Africa is part of the Arab Empire.
969-1171	The Fatimids rule Egypt.
1250-1517	The Mamelukes rule Egypt.
1261	The Mamelukes defeat the Mongols.

Cities of East Africa

Around the year 1000, busy ports began to grow up on the coast of East Africa (see map). Merchants from Arabia, India and China sailed to these ports bringing tools, cloth, glass and china. In return, the Africans traded gold and ivory, iron and slaves, and even wild animals.



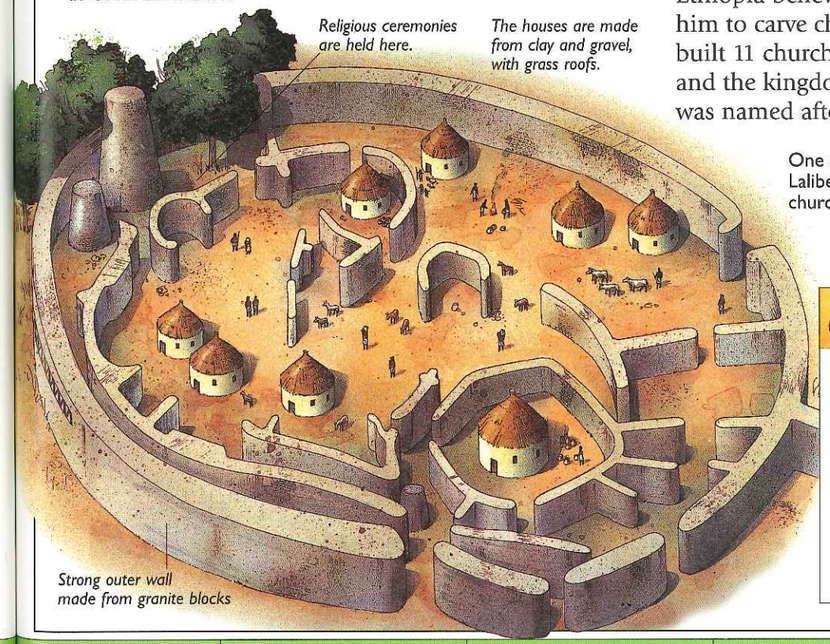
East Africans gave this giraffe to the Chinese emperor as a gift.

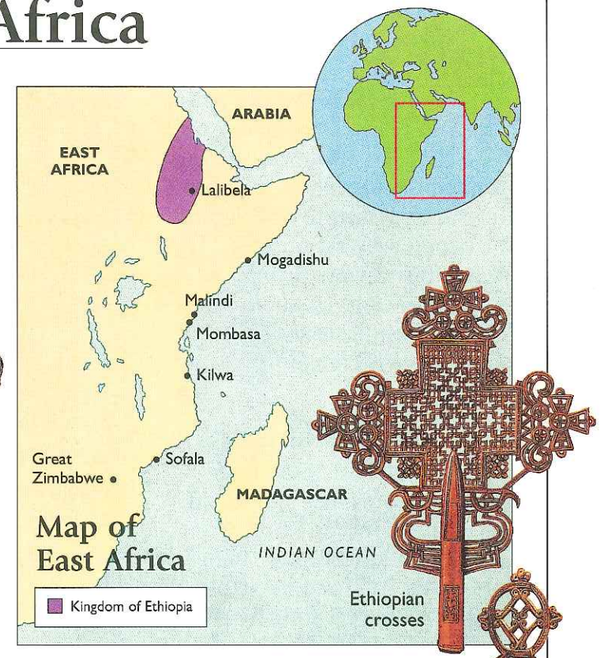
Stone bird from Great Zimbabwe

City of gold

People from all over southeast Africa brought gold to the city of Great Zimbabwe. The gold was collected in the city, then sent on to ports along the coast. The rulers of Great Zimbabwe became rich and powerful. They lived inside a walled fortress in the middle of the city.

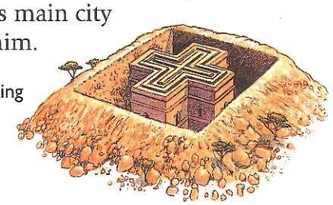
This picture shows the fortress at Great Zimbabwe.





The kingdom of Ethiopia

The Christian kingdom of Ethiopia was created around 1000. King Lalibela of Ethiopia believed that God had ordered him to carve churches out of rock. He built 11 churches which became very famous and the kingdom's main city was named after him.



One of King Lalibela's churches

Important dates

c.1000	The kingdom of Ethiopia is created.
c.1000-1200	Trading ports grow up on the east coast of Africa.
1200-1230	King Lalibela's churches are built in Ethiopia.
c.1350	Great Zimbabwe is at its largest.