



# The Age of Chivalry

## MAIN IDEA

**RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS**  
The code of chivalry for knights glorified both combat and romantic love.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The code of chivalry has shaped modern ideas of romance in Western cultures.

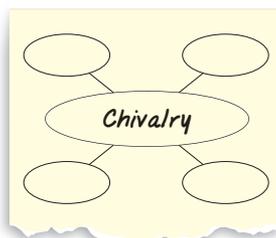
## TERMS & NAMES

- chivalry
- tournament
- troubadour

**SETTING THE STAGE** During the Middle Ages, nobles constantly fought one another. Their feuding kept Europe in a fragmented state for centuries. Through warfare, feudal lords defended their estates, seized new territories, and increased their wealth. Lords and their armies lived in a violent society that prized combat skills. By the 1100s, though, a code of behavior began to arise. High ideals guided warriors' actions and glorified their roles.

### TAKING NOTES

**Summarizing** Identify the ideas associated with chivalry.



## Knights: Warriors on Horseback

Soldiers mounted on horseback became valuable in combat during the reign of Charlemagne's grandfather, Charles Martel, in the 700s. Charles Martel had observed that the Muslim cavalry often turned the tide of battles. As a result, he organized Frankish troops of armored horsemen, or knights.

**The Technology of Warfare Changes** Leather saddles and stirrups changed the way warfare was conducted in Europe during the 700s. Both had been developed in Asia around 200 B.C.

The saddle kept a warrior firmly seated on a moving horse. Stirrups enabled him to ride and handle heavier weapons. Without stirrups to brace him, a charging warrior was likely to topple off his own horse. Frankish knights, galloping full tilt, could knock over enemy foot soldiers and riders on horseback. Gradually, mounted knights became the most important part of an army. Their warhorses played a key military role.

**The Warrior's Role in Feudal Society** By the 11th century, western Europe was a battleground of warring nobles vying for power. To defend their territories, feudal lords raised private armies of knights. In exchange for military service,



◀ These two-inch iron spikes, called caltrops, were strewn on a battlefield to maim warhorses or enemy foot soldiers.

feudal lords used their most abundant resource—land. They rewarded knights, their most skilled warriors, with fiefs from their sprawling estates. Wealth from these fiefs allowed knights to devote their lives to war. Knights could afford to pay for costly weapons, armor, and warhorses.

As the lord's vassal, a knight's main obligation was to serve in battle. From his knights, a lord typically demanded about 40 days of combat a year. Knights' pastimes also often revolved around training for war. Wrestling and hunting helped them gain strength and practice the skills they would need on the battlefield.

## Knighthood and the Code of Chivalry

Knights were expected to display courage in battle and loyalty to their lord. By the 1100s, the code of **chivalry** (SHIHV•uhl•ree), a complex set of ideals, demanded that a knight fight bravely in defense of three masters. He devoted himself to his earthly feudal lord, his heavenly Lord, and his chosen lady. The chivalrous knight also protected the weak and the poor. The ideal knight was loyal, brave, and courteous. Most knights, though, failed to meet all of these high standards. For example, they treated the lower classes brutally.

**A Knight's Training** Sons of nobles began training for knighthood at an early age and learned the code of chivalry. At age 7, a boy would be sent off to the castle of another lord. As a page, he waited on his hosts and began to practice fighting skills. At around age 14, the page reached the rank of squire. A squire acted as a servant to a knight. At around age 21, a squire became a full-fledged knight.

### > Analyzing Art

#### Chivalry

The Italian painter Paolo Uccello captures the spirit of the age of chivalry in this painting, *St. George and the Dragon* (c. 1455–1460).

According to myth, St. George rescues a captive princess by killing her captor, a dragon.

- **The Knight** St. George, mounted on a horse and dressed in armor, uses his lance to attack the dragon.
- **The Dragon** The fierce-looking dragon represents evil.
- **The Princess** The princess remains out of the action as her knight fights the dragon on her behalf.

#### SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Visual Sources

In what way does this painting show the knight's code of chivalry?



INTERACTIVE

## Castles and Siege Weapons

Attacking armies carefully planned how to capture a castle. Engineers would inspect the castle walls for weak points in the stone. Then, enemy soldiers would try to ram the walls, causing them to collapse. At the battle site, attackers often constructed the heavy and clumsy weapons shown here.

### Siege Tower

- had a platform on top that lowered like a drawbridge
- could support weapons and soldiers

### Mantlet

- shielded soldiers

### Battering Ram

- made of heavy timber with a sharp metal tip
- swung like a pendulum to crack castle walls or to knock down drawbridge

### Trebuchet

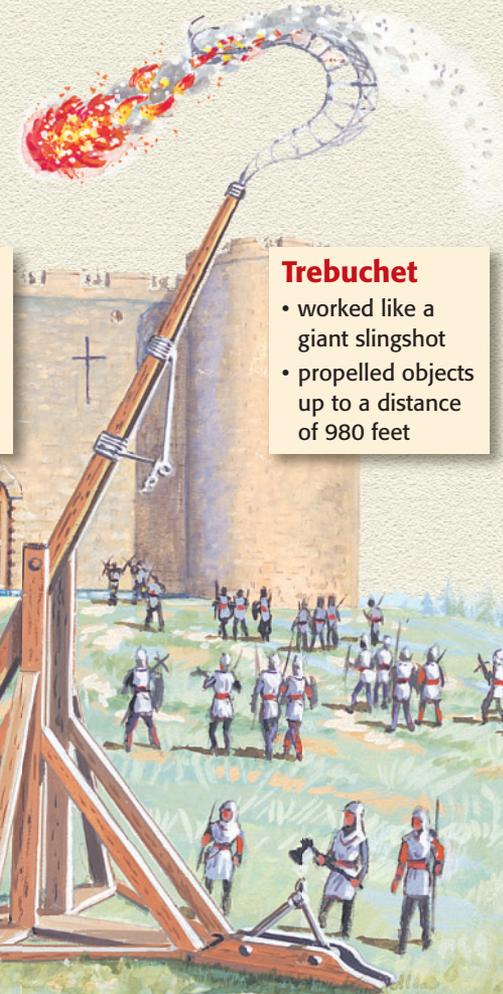
- worked like a giant slingshot
- propelled objects up to a distance of 980 feet

### Tortoise

- moved slowly on wheels
- sheltered soldiers from falling arrows

### Mangonel

- flung huge rocks that crashed into castle walls
- propelled objects up to a distance of 1,300 feet



### An Array of High-Flying Missiles

Using the trebuchet, enemy soldiers launched a wide variety of missiles over the castle walls:

- pots of burning lime
- captured soldiers
- boulders
- diseased cows
- severed human heads
- dead horses

### Connect to Today

**1. Making Inferences** How do these siege weapons show that their designers knew the architecture of a castle well?

 See Skillbuilder Handbook, Page R16.

**2. Drawing Conclusions** What are some examples of modern weapons of war? What do they indicate about the way war is conducted today?

### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**RESEARCH LINKS** For more on medieval weapons go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com)

## MAIN IDEA

### Comparing

**A** How are tournaments like modern sports competitions?

### Vocabulary

A *siege* is a military blockade staged by enemy armies trying to capture a fortress.

After being dubbed a knight, most young men traveled for a year or two. The young knights gained experience fighting in local wars. Some took part in mock battles called **tournaments**. Tournaments combined recreation with combat training. Two armies of knights charged each other. Trumpets blared, and lords and ladies cheered. Like real battles, tournaments were fierce and bloody competitions. Winners could usually demand large ransoms from defeated knights. **A**

**Brutal Reality of Warfare** The small-scale violence of tournaments did not match the bloodshed of actual battles, especially those fought at castles. By the 1100s, massive walls and guard towers encircled stone castles. These castles dominated much of the countryside in western Europe. Lord and lady, their family, knights and other men-at-arms, and servants made their home in the castle. The castle also was a fortress, designed for defense.

A castle under siege was a gory sight. Attacking armies used a wide range of strategies and weapons to force castle residents to surrender. Defenders of a castle poured boiling water, hot oil, or molten lead on enemy soldiers. Expert archers were stationed on the roof of the castle. Armed with crossbows, they fired deadly bolts that could pierce full armor.

## The Literature of Chivalry

In the 1100s, the themes of medieval literature downplayed the brutality of knighthood and feudal warfare. Many stories idealized castle life. They glorified knighthood and chivalry, tournaments and real battles. Songs and poems about a knight's undying love for a lady were also very popular.

**Epic Poetry** Feudal lords and their ladies enjoyed listening to epic poems. These poems recounted a hero's deeds and adventures. Many epics retold stories about legendary heroes such as King Arthur and Charlemagne.

*The Song of Roland* is one of the earliest and most famous medieval epic poems. It praises a band of French soldiers who perished in battle during Charlemagne's reign. The poem transforms the event into a struggle. A few brave French knights led by Roland battle an overwhelming army of Muslims from Spain. Roland's friend, Turpin the Archbishop, stands as a shining example of medieval ideals. Turpin represents courage, faith, and chivalry:

### PRIMARY SOURCE

And now there comes the Archbishop.  
He spurs his horse, goes up into a mountain,  
summons the French; and he preached them a sermon:  
"Barons, my lords, [Charlemagne] left us in this place.  
We know our duty: to die like good men for our King.  
Fight to defend the holy Christian faith."

from *The Song of Roland*

**Love Poems and Songs** Under the code of chivalry, a knight's duty to his lady became as important as his duty to his lord. In many medieval poems, the hero's difficulties resulted from a conflict between those two obligations.

**Troubadours** were traveling poet-musicians at the castles and courts of Europe. They composed short verses and

## Connect to Today

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### Epic Films

The long, narrative epic poem has given way in modern times to the epic film. Epic films feature larger-than-life characters in powerful stories that deal with mythic and timeless themes. These films take their stories from history, legend, and fantasy. The first epic film was *Birth of a Nation*, released in 1915.

Some modern epic films are *Braveheart* (1995), pictured above; *Gladiator* (2000); and the *Star Wars* saga (six films, 1977–2005).

### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**INTERNET ACTIVITY** Research five epic films. Write a one-sentence description of the historical content for each. Go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com) for your research.

songs about the joys and sorrows of romantic love. Sometimes troubadours sang their own verses in the castles of their lady. They also sent roving minstrels to carry their songs to courts.

A troubadour might sing about love's disappointments: "My loving heart, my faithfulness, myself, my world she deigns to take. Then leave me bare and comfortless to longing thoughts that ever wake."

Other songs told of lovesick knights who adored ladies they would probably never win: "Love of a far-off land/For you my heart is aching/And I can find no relief." The code of chivalry promoted a false image of knights, making them seem more romantic than brutal. In turn, these love songs created an artificial image of women. In the troubadour's eyes, noblewomen were always beautiful and pure.

The most celebrated woman of the age was Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122–1204). Troubadours flocked to her court in the French duchy of Aquitaine. Later, as queen of England, Eleanor was the mother of two kings, Richard the Lion-Hearted and John. Richard himself composed romantic songs and poems.

## Women's Role in Feudal Society

Most women in feudal society were powerless, just as most men were. But women had the added burden of being thought inferior to men. This was the view of the Church and was generally accepted in feudal society. Nonetheless, women

### > Analyzing Primary Sources

#### Daily Life of a Noblewoman

This excerpt describes the daily life of an English noblewoman of the Middle Ages, Cicely Neville, Duchess of York. A typical noblewoman is pictured below.

##### PRIMARY SOURCE



She gets up at 7 a.m., and her chaplain is waiting to say morning prayers . . . and when she has washed and dressed . . . she has breakfast, then she goes to the chapel, for another service, then has dinner. . . . After dinner, she discusses business . . . then has a short sleep, then drinks ale or wine. Then . . . she goes to the chapel for evening service, and has supper. After supper, she relaxes with her women attendants. . . . After that, she goes to her private room, and says nighttime prayers. By 8 p.m. she is in bed.

**DAILY ROUTINE OF CICELY, DUCHESS OF YORK,**  
quoted in *Women in Medieval Times* by Fiona Macdonald

#### Daily Life of a Peasant Woman

This excerpt describes the daily life of a typical medieval peasant woman as pictured below.

##### PRIMARY SOURCE



I get up early . . . milk our cows and turn them into the field. . . . Then I make butter. . . . Afterward I make cheese. . . . Then the children need looking after. . . . I give the chickens food . . . and look after the young geese. . . . I bake, I brew. . . . I twist rope. . . . I tease out wool, and card it, and spin it on a wheel. . . . I organize food for the cattle, and for ourselves. . . . I look after all the household.

**FROM A BALLAD FIRST WRITTEN  
DOWN IN ABOUT 1500,** quoted in *Women  
in Medieval Times* by Fiona Macdonald

#### DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

- 1. Drawing Conclusions** What seem to be the major concerns in the noblewoman's life? How do they compare with those of the peasant woman?
- 2. Making Inferences** What qualities would you associate with the peasant woman and the life she lived?

played important roles in the lives of both noble and peasant families.

**Noblewomen** Under the feudal system, a noblewoman could inherit an estate from her husband. Upon her lord's request, she could also send his knights to war. When her husband was off fighting, the lady of a medieval castle might act as military commander and a warrior. At times, noblewomen played a key role in defending castles. They hurled rocks and fired arrows at attackers. (See the illustration to the right.)

In reality, however, the lives of most noblewomen were limited. Whether young or old, females in noble families generally were confined to activities in the home or the convent. Also, noblewomen held little property because lords passed down their fiefs to sons and not to daughters. **B**

**Peasant Women** For the vast majority of women of the lower classes, life had remained unchanged for centuries. Peasant women performed endless labor around the home and often in the fields, bore children, and took care of their families. Young peasant girls learned practical household skills from their mother at an early age, unlike daughters in rich households who were educated by tutors. Females in peasant families were poor and powerless. Yet, the economic contribution they made was essential to the survival of the peasant household.

As you have read in this section, the Church significantly influenced the status of medieval women. In Section 4, you will read just how far-reaching was the influence of the Church in the Middle Ages.



▲ The noblewomen depicted in this manuscript show their courage and combat skills in defending a castle against enemies.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Summarizing**

**B** What privileges did a noblewoman have in medieval society?

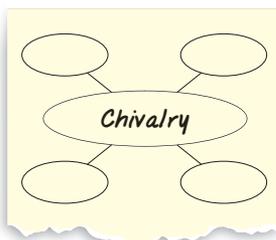
**SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT**

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- chivalry
- tournament
- troubadour

**USING YOUR NOTES**

2. Which ideas associated with chivalry have remnants in today's society? Explain.



**MAIN IDEAS**

3. What were two inventions from Asia that changed the technology of warfare in western Europe?
4. Who were the occupants of a castle?
5. What were some of the themes of medieval literature?

**CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING**

6. **DEVELOPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE** How important a role did knights play in the feudal system?
7. **MAKING INFERENCES** How was the code of chivalry like the idea of romantic love?
8. **COMPARING AND CONTRASTING** In what ways were the lives of a noblewoman and a peasant woman the same? different?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS** Write a **persuasive essay** in support of the adoption of a code of chivalry, listing the positive effects it might have on feudal society.

**CONNECT TO TODAY** **WRITING AN ADVERTISEMENT**

Conduct research to learn more about tournaments. Then, write a 50-word **advertisement** promoting a tournament to be held at a modern re-creation of a medieval fair.