

# The Middle Ages

by David Adams Leeming

*At his most characteristic, medieval man was not a dreamer nor a wanderer. He was an organizer, a codifier, a builder of systems. He wanted "a place for everything and everything in the right place." Distinction, definition, tabulation were his delight. Though full of turbulent activities, he was equally full of the impulse to formalize them. War was (in intention) formalized by the art of heraldry and the rules of chivalry; sexual passion (in intention), by the elaborate code of love. . . . There was nothing which medieval people liked better, or did better, than sorting out and tidying up.*

*Of all our modern inventions I*

*suspect that they would most have admired the card index.*

*—C. S. Lewis*

Illustration from a French manuscript of *Romance of the Rose* (15th century).  
British Library, London.



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LEO 12-Middle Ages

**I**n October 1066, a daylong battle near Hastings, England, changed the course of history. There, just ten miles from the channel dividing England from France, Duke William of Normandy, France, defeated and killed King Harold of England, the last of the Anglo-Saxon kings. So began the Norman Conquest, an event that radically affected English history, the English character, and the English language. Unlike the Romans, the Normans never withdrew from England.

Who was this William the Conqueror? He was the illegitimate son of the previous duke of Normandy, who was in turn a cousin of the English king called Edward the Confessor. Edward had died childless earlier in 1066, and Harold, the earl of Wessex, had been crowned the following day. But William claimed that the old king had promised the throne to him. Determined to seize what he considered rightfully his, William sailed the English Channel with an enormous army.

William was an efficient and ruthless soldier, but he wanted to rule the Anglo-Saxons, not eliminate them. Today, as a result, rather than a Norman, French-speaking England (and America), we find a culture and a language that combine Norman and Anglo-Saxon elements. To the Anglo-Saxons' more democratic and artistic tendencies, the Normans brought administrative ability, an emphasis on law and order, and cultural unity.

One of William's great administrative feats was an inventory of nearly every piece of property in England—land, cattle, buildings—in the Domesday Book. (The title suggests a comparison between William's judgment of his subjects' financial worth and God's final judgment of their moral worth.) For the first time in European history, people could be taxed based on what they owned.

Although the Normans did not erase Anglo-Saxon culture, they did bring significant changes to England. William and many of his successors remained dukes of Normandy as well as kings of England. The powerful Anglo-Norman entity they molded brought England into mainstream European civilization in a new way. For example, William divided the holdings of the fallen English landowners

October 14, 1066, was one of the decisive days of history. The battle itself was nip and tuck; the shift only of a few elements here or there, a gift of luck could have given the victory to the Anglo-Saxons. If Harold had won at Hastings and had survived, William would have had no choice but to renounce his adventure. There is little likelihood that anyone would have attempted a serious invasion of England during the next millennium—by water, at least. England would have strengthened its bonds with Scandinavia while remaining distrustful of the western Continent—even more distrustful than it is today. The native Anglo-Saxon culture would have developed in unimaginable ways, and William the Conqueror would be dimly known in history only as William the Bastard.

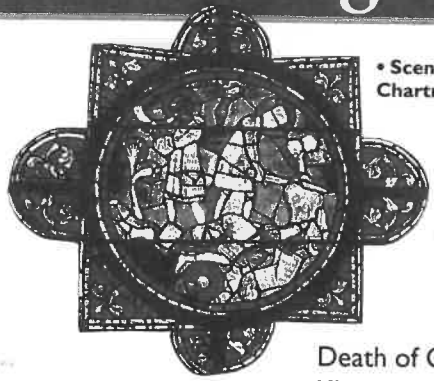
—Morris Bishop



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# The Middle Ages, 1066–1485



• Scene from the *Story of Roland*, from Chartres Cathedral, France (13th century).

Death of Omar Khayyám, Persian poet and astronomer, 1131

In France, Chrétien de Troyes writes *Lancelot*, c. 1170s

Marie de France, first known European woman to write narrative poetry, dies, c. 1216

Persian poet Saadi born, 1213

French heroic poem, *Song of Roland*, written, c. 1100

In Spain, first mass production of paper, c. 1150

Beginnings of German epic poem, the *Nibelungenlied*, c. 1200

1066–1099	1100–1149	1150–1199	1200–1249
King Edward the Confessor dies without heir, 1066	Knights Templar, a religious order whose mission was to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land, founded, c. 1119	Construction begins on Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, 1163	Mongol leader Genghis Khan invades China, 1211
Duke of Normandy invades England, 1066		Thomas à Becket murdered, 1170	English barons force King John to sign the Magna Carta, 1215
Domesday Book, a record of all land ownership in England, first compiled, 1086		Henry II invades Ireland, beginning nearly eight hundred years of British domination, 1171	Pope Gregory IX begins the Inquisition, c. 1232
Crusades begin, to free Jerusalem from Turkish control, 1095		Minamoto Yoritomo becomes first shogun (military ruler) of Japan, 1192	



• A man and his wife on horseback, the wife riding pillion (on a cushioned saddle), from a book of hours (c. 1500). British Library, London.



Musee Condé.

• From *Hours of the Duchess of Burgundy* (c. 1450).

**Boccaccio** writes the *Decameron*, 1349–1353

**Geoffrey Chaucer** born, c. 1343

Julian of Norwich, one of the first English women of letters, born, c. 1342

Petrarch crowned poet laureate in Italy, 1341

Development of Japanese Nōh plays, 1300s

Dante Alighieri begins writing the *Divine Comedy*, c. 1307

**Chaucer** begins *The Canterbury Tales*, c. 1387

Entire Bible translated into English for first time by followers of John Wycliffe, 1380

Legendary hero Robin Hood appears in *Piers Plowman*, c. 1378

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* written, c. 1375

Margery Kempe, author of first autobiography in English, born, c. 1373

**Thomas Malory's** *Le Morte Darthur* first printed by Caxton, 1485

William Caxton prints first book in English, c. 1475

First book printed with movable type by Gutenberg, 1455

In France, Christine de Pisan writes famous allegory, *Book of the City of Ladies*, 1405

**Chaucer** dies, 1400

Thomas Aquinas writes *Summa Theologica*, 1266–1273

**1250–1299**

First commoners allowed in British Parliament, c. 1250

Crusades end, 1270



• Marco Polo in Beijing.

Venetian traveler Marco Polo visits court of Kublai Khan in China, 1275

Edward I invades Scotland and declares himself king, 1296

**1300–1349**

Zimbabwe emerges as major trading empire, 1300s

Aztecs begin to establish empire in Mexico, 1325

Hundred Years' War between England and France begins, 1337

Black Death strikes England, 1348

**1350–1399**

English language used to open Parliament, 1362



• Chinese porcelain jar (15th century), Huan-te (Xuande) period, Ming dynasty.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Robert E. Tod, 1937. (37.191.1). Photograph by Schechter Lee. Photograph © 1986 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Ming dynasty begins 300-year rule of China, 1368

Peasants' Revolt in England, 1381

King Richard II deposed, 1399

**1400–1485**

Benin Kingdom in West Africa flourishes, 1400s

In France, Joan of Arc burned at the stake by the English, 1431

Inca Empire established in Peru, c. 1438

Italian inventor and artist Leonardo da Vinci born, 1452

War between the Houses of York and Lancaster (also called the Wars of the Roses), 1455–1485

Birth of Nicolaus Copernicus, European astronomer, 1473

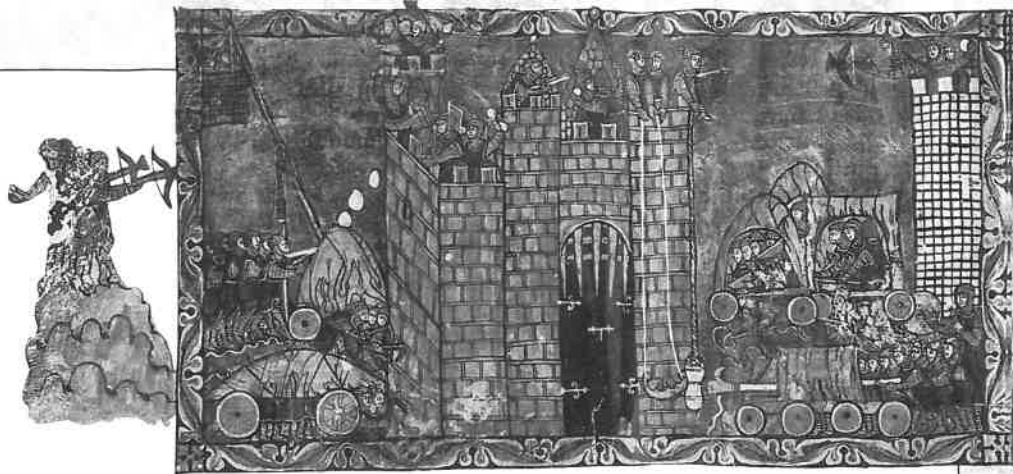
Martin Luther born in Germany, 1483

First Tudor king, Henry VII, is crowned, 1485



• Wooden helmet of an Aztec warrior. © British Museum, London.

An attack on a fortress, from a French manuscript (detail) (13th–14th century). MS Fr. 1604, fol. 57v.



© cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

among his own followers. These men and their families brought to England not only a new language—French—but also a new social system—feudalism—which displaced the old Nōrdic social structure described in *Beowulf*.

***The Anglo-Norman entity that resulted from the Norman Conquest brought England into mainstream European civilization, which included feudalism.***

### Feudalism and Knighthood: Pyramid Power

More than simply a social system, feudalism was also a caste system, a property system, and a military system. Ultimately, it was based on a religious concept of hierarchy, with God as the supreme overlord. In this sense, even a king held land as a vassal

... there was not one hide of land in England that he did not know who owned it, and what it was worth . . .

—from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

## A CLOSER LOOK

### A TERRIBLE WORM IN AN IRON COCOON

If we hear the term “medieval period,” we inevitably think of knights and their magnificent suits of armor. During the early Middle Ages, armor consisted of a helmet, a shield, and a relatively flexible mail shirt, or hauberk, made of countless riveted or welded iron rings. With the crossbow, however, came the need for more protection, so the knight was forced to compromise flexibility and mobility for self-defense.

Held together by rivets, leather straps, hinges, turning pins, buckles, and pegs, a suit of armor replaced mail as the warrior’s chief protection. Knights wore a heavily padded undergarment of leather and a mail shirt under the armor, in addition to plate arm, leg, and foot pieces. Mail covered the neck, elbows, and

other joints, and gauntlets constructed of linked plates covered the hands. Some suits of armor weighed 120 pounds and contained 200 custom-fitted iron plates. The knight also carried a variety of weapons: lance, dagger, sword, battle-ax, and club-headed mace.

The threat of death in battle was bad enough, but the armor itself could also be fatal—causing death from suffocation, heart failure, even drowning. Battle during hot weather was particularly difficult. Since small slits in the helmet allowed only a limited line of vision and little ventilation, heatstroke—often deadly for the knight—was common. One anonymous poem describes the armored knight as “a terrible worm in an iron cocoon.”

by "divine right." A king as powerful as William the Conqueror could stand firmly at the top of the pyramid. He could appoint certain barons as his immediate vassals, allotting them portions of his land in return for their economic or military allegiance—or both. In turn, the barons could appoint vassals of their own. The system operated all the way down to the landless knights and to the serfs, who were not free to leave the land they tilled.

The feudal system did not always work. Secure in a well-fortified castle, a vassal might choose not to honor his obligations to a weak overlord. The ensuing battles between iron-clad knights around moated castles account for one of the enduring images of the Middle Ages.

Yet the feudal system did carry with it a sense of form and manners that permeated the life, art, and literature of the Middle Ages. This sense of formalism came to life most fully in the institution of knighthood and in the related practice, or code, of chivalry.

We cannot think of the medieval period without thinking of knights. Since the primary duty of males above the serf class was military service to their lords, boys were trained from an early age to become warriors. Often, their training took place in houses other than their own, to be sure that the training was strict. When a boy's training was completed,

The bond between lord and vassal was affirmed or reaffirmed by the ceremony of homage. The vassal knelt, placed his clasped hands within those of his master, declared, "Lord, I become your man," and took an oath of fealty. The lord raised him to his feet and bestowed on him a ceremonial kiss. The vassal was thenceforth bound by his oath "to love what his lord loved and loathe what he loathed, and never by word or deed do aught that should grieve him."

—Morris Bishop

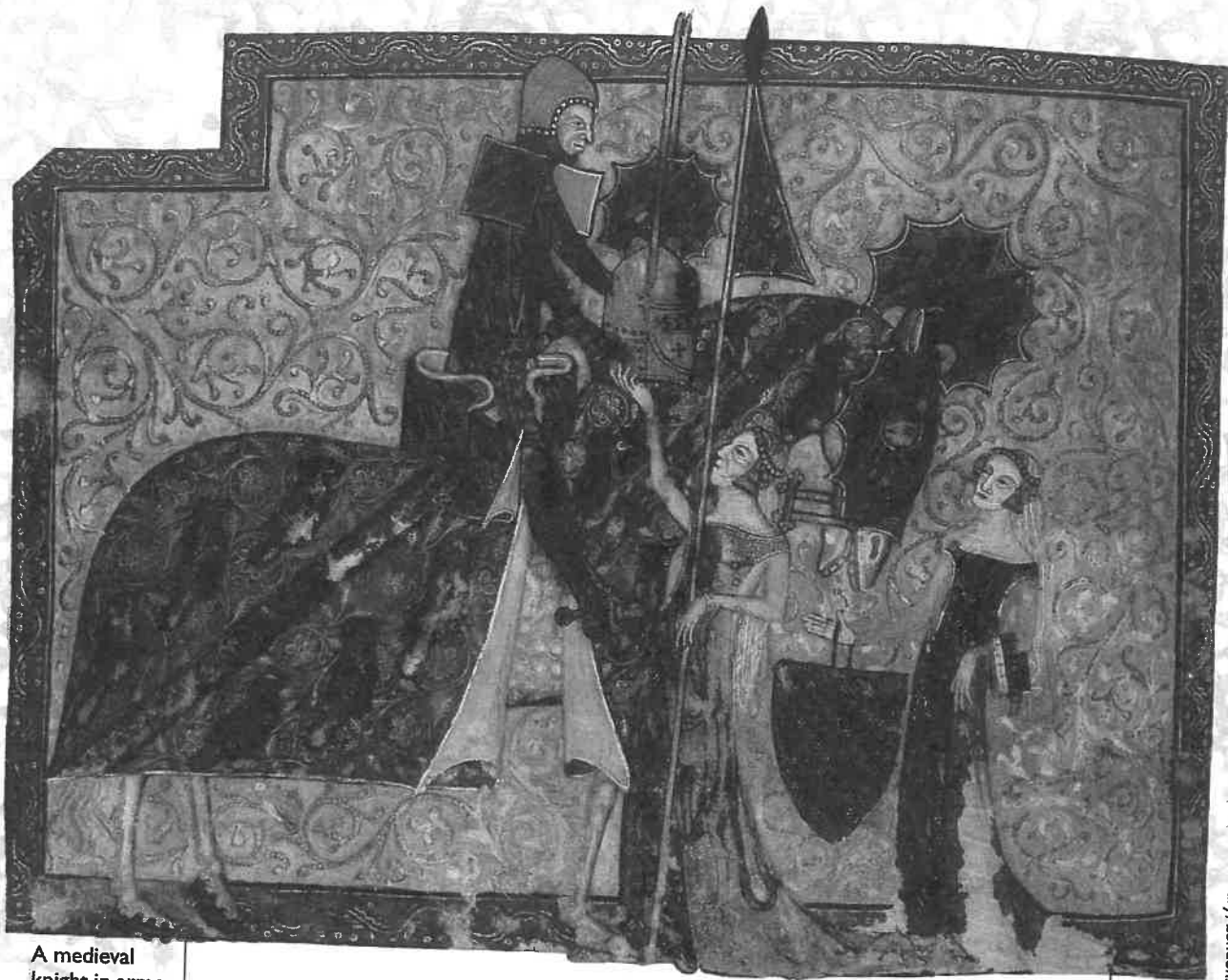
Only aristocratic knights could afford the huge cost of armor, a war horse, pack-horses, a mount to ride when not in battle, and servants. Because of the armor's weight and the complex fittings required to piece it together, a knight couldn't dress himself for battle. In fact, battles were usually scheduled to allow the warring knights time to be dressed. Servants stood by during battle in case the knight was unhorsed. An armored knight on his back was like an upside-down turtle trying to get on its feet. In this position, the knight was vulnerable to his adversary. If he fell into a shallow body of water, he could drown.

During the fifteenth century, the knight and his horse were considered invulnerable. But this role changed dramatically when the long-bow and later the musket ball came into war-

fare. When his armor could no longer protect him in battle, the knight in shining armor became more of a courtier than a combatant. In the last years of their existence, knights participated in exhibitions rather than in warfare.



Chain-mail maker.  
Stadtbibliothek,  
Nürnberg.



By permission of the British Library, London.

A medieval knight in armor. MS 42130, fol. 202v.

he was “dubbed,” or ceremonially tapped on his shoulder (originally a hard, testing blow). Once knighted, the youth became a man with the title “sir” and the full rights of the warrior caste.

Knighthood was grounded in the feudal ideal of loyalty, and it entailed a complex system of social codes. Breaking any one of those codes would undermine not only the knight’s position but also the very institution of knighthood. Thus, in the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (page 159), his code of honor binds Gawain to accept a challenge that he believes will bring him certain death.

***Feudalism was a pyramid system based on a religious concept of hierarchy. Expected to serve as warriors, males above the serf class were trained as knights.***

### **Women in Medieval Society: No Voice, No Choice**

Since they were not soldiers, women had no political rights in a system that was primarily military. A woman was always subservient to a man, whether husband, father, or brother. Her husband’s or father’s social



Off for a day of haying, a peasant pushes his wife to work in a wheelbarrow. MS Lat. 1173, fol. 4v.

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standing determined the degree of respect she commanded. For peasant women, life was a ceaseless round of childbearing, housework, and hard fieldwork. Women of higher station were occupied with childbearing and household supervision. Such women might even manage entire estates while their men were away on business or at war, but the moment the men returned, the women relinquished their temporary powers.

**Women in the Middle Ages had no political rights. A woman's social standing depended completely on her husband's or father's status.**

A woman is a worthy wight;  
She serveth a man both daye and nyght;  
Thereto she putteth all her might,  
And yet she hath but care and woe.

—Anonymous (fifteenth century)

### Chivalry and Courtly Love: Ideal but Unreal

Chivalry was a system of ideals and social codes governing the behavior of knights and gentlewomen. Among its precepts were adhering to one's oath of loyalty to the overlord and observing certain rules of warfare, such as never attacking an unarmed opponent. In addition, adoring a particular lady (not necessarily one's wife) was seen as a means of achieving self-improvement.



Noblewomen watching a tournament, from a German manuscript (c. 14th century): Cod. Pal. Germ. 848, Codex Manesse, fol. 52v.

Universitätsbibliothek, Heidelberg.



The idea that revering and acting in the name of a lady would make a knight braver and better was central to one aspect of chivalry, courtly love. Courtly love was, in its ideal form, nonsexual. A knight might wear his lady's colors in battle, he might glorify her in words and be inspired by her, but the lady always remained pure and out of reach. She was "set above" her admirer, just as the feudal lord was set above his vassal. Since such a concept flew in the face of

We may still see on illuminated screens the knight, with a change of clothing and locale. He has gone Western, but still he is the dextrous cavalier, vaulting to his saddle, the mighty fighter for virtue, ill educated but possessed of a salty wisdom, worshipful, faithful, and tonguetied in the presence of good women.

—Morris Bishop

## The Middle Ages: Four Centuries of Change

These characteristics distinguished the Middle Ages:

- The Norman Conquest of England created a powerful Anglo-Norman entity and brought England into the mainstream of European civilization.
- The feudal system centralized military, political, and economic power in the Crown.
- The Roman Church transcended national boundaries and fostered cultural unity among Europeans.
- The rise of towns and cities freed people to pursue their own commercial and artistic interests.
- The Magna Carta weakened the political power of the Church and laid the groundwork for later English constitutional law.
- Exposure to Eastern civilization as a result of the Crusades broadened Europeans' intellectual horizons.
- The ideals of chivalry improved attitudes toward, but not the rights of, women.
- The rise of the yeoman class paved the way for democracy in England.
- The bubonic plague created a labor shortage that contributed to the end of feudalism and to the passing of the Middle Ages.

human nature, it provided built-in drama for poets and storytellers, as the King Arthur sagas illustrate. When Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, for example, cross the line between courtly and physical love, the whole social system represented by Arthur's Round Table collapses. Camelot crumbles.

Chivalry brought about an idealized attitude toward women, but it did little to improve their actual position. A woman's perceived value remained tied to the value of the lands she brought to a marriage. But chivalry did give rise to a new form of literature, the romance (page 167). The greatest English example of the genre is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Wandering minstrels told many other romances, but most of them were the equivalents of *dum-de-dum* doggerel verse today.

***Chivalry led to an idealized attitude toward women and gave rise to a new form of literature, the romance.***

## The New City Classes: Out from Under the Overlords

For the most part, medieval society centered around the feudal castle, but as the population grew, an increasing number of people lived in towns and cities. Eventually, those population centers would render the feudal system obsolete.

The development of the city classes—lower, middle, and upper-middle—is evident in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer (page 98). Many of his characters make

their livings outside the feudal system, and their horizons are defined not by any lord's manor but by such cities as London and Canterbury.

More important, the emerging merchant class had its own tastes in the arts and the ability to pay for what it wanted. Consequently, much medieval art is not aristocratic; it is middle class, even "people's art." The people of the cities were free, tied neither to the land nor to knighthood and chivalry. Their point of view was expressed in the ballads sung in alehouses and at firesides (page 90), in the mystery and miracle plays performed outdoors by the new guilds or craft unions, and even in the great cathedrals and municipal buildings that are synonymous with England to so many tourists today.

**Gradually population centers shifted to the cities, where people lived and worked outside of the feudal system.**

## The Great Happenings

Against the backdrop of the feudal system imported from the Continent, several specific events radically influenced the course of English history, as well as English literature.

**The Crusades: Ho! for the Holy Land.** In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, we meet a knight who has fought in "heathen" places—along the Mediterranean Sea and in North Africa. The knight's adventures in the fourteenth

Scene from *Passages d'Outremer* (detail) (15th century), depicting the Crusaders' attack, in 1153, on Ascalon, a Muslim-held city on the coast of the Holy Land. MS Fr. 5594, fol. 157v.

© cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.



century were really an extension of the Crusades (1095-1270), a series of wars waged by European Christians against the Muslims, with Jerusalem and the Holy Land as the prize. Although the Europeans ultimately failed to hold Jerusalem, they benefited enormously from contact with the higher civilization of the Middle East. This contact with Eastern mathematics, astronomy, architecture, and crafts made possible the rich, varied life we find in Chaucer. If the Crusades produced Chaucer's fairly conventional Knight, they were also at least indirectly responsible for his lively Squire and elegant Prioress.

**As a result of the Crusades, Christian Europe was exposed to the Middle East's sophisticated civilization.**

**The martyrdom of Thomas à Becket: Murder in the cathedral.** When Chaucer's pilgrims set out for Canterbury, their goal was the shrine of Saint Thomas à Becket (c. 1118-1170). Thomas, a Norman, had risen to great power as chancellor (prime minister) under his friend King Henry II (reigned 1154-1189). At that time, all Christians belonged to the Catholic Church.

Even King Henry was a vassal—of the pope, the head of the Church and God's representative. The pope in those days was enormously powerful and controlled most of the crowned heads of Europe. By appointing his trusted friend Thomas as archbishop of Canterbury (head of the Catholic Church in England), Henry hoped to gain the upper hand in disputes with the Church. But the independent and often combative Thomas took the pope's side more than once, infuriating the king. In December 1170, Henry raged, "Will no one rid me of

*Martyrdom of Thomas Becket, from an English psalter (detail) (13th century). MS W34, fol. 15v. The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.*



Then the third knight inflicted a terrible wound as he lay, by which the sword was broken against the pavement, and the crown which was large was separated from the head; so that the blood white with the brain and the brain red with blood, dyed the surface of the virgin mother Church with the life and death of the confessor and martyr in the colors of the lily and the rose.

—Thomas Grim, an eyewitness to Becket's death

this turbulent priest?" Taking his words literally, four of Henry's knights murdered Becket—right in his own cathedral. Public outrage at the murder led to devotion to St. Thomas the Martyr, and created a backlash against Henry, a significant setback for the monarchy in its power struggles with Rome.

At its worst, this setback led to the kinds of liberties taken by several of the clergymen in *The Canterbury Tales*—corruption that the

state was in no position to correct. Thus, Chaucer's Monk lives a life of luxury without regard to the poor, his Friar chases women and money, and his Summoner and his Pardoner blackmail people with threats of eternal damnation.

Yet the medieval Church did have one positive effect: It fostered cultural unity—a system of belief and symbol that transcended the national cultures of Europe. The Church continued to be the center of learning. Its monasteries were the libraries and publishers of the time, and its language, Latin, remained the international language of educated Europeans. Its leader, the pope, was king of all kings—and his "kingdom" had no boundaries.

**Public outrage at the political assassination of Thomas à Becket created a backlash against the English monarchy and weakened the king in his power struggle with Rome.**

**The Magna Carta: Power to (some of) the people.** The event that most clearly heralded a return to older, democratic tendencies in England was the signing of the Magna Carta (the "Great Charter") by King John in 1215, at Runnymede. The vicious but pragmatic John was strongly backed by the pope, but the English barons forced him to sign the document. The signing was a defeat for central papal power. As aristocrats writing for aristocrats, the barons had no interest in the rights of the common people. But the Magna Carta later became the basis for English constitutional law, in which such rights as trial by jury and legislative taxation were established.

**In 1215, English barons forced King John to sign the Magna Carta as an effort to curb the Church's power. The document later became the basis for English constitutional law.**

No freeman shall be taken, or imprisoned, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any way harmed, nor will we go upon him nor will we send upon him, except by the legal judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.

To none will we sell, to none deny or delay, right or justice.

—Magna Carta, Clauses 39 and 40

## FLEAS, MONEY, AND GUNPOWDER: THE END OF AN ERA

The legendary pageantry, the codes of chivalry, the heroic quests undertaken by valiant knights in honor of fair ladies—these images come to mind at the mention of the Middle Ages. But what happened? Why did this period come to an end? Besides the plague's devastating effects, the development of a monetary system and the introduction of gunpowder contributed to changes in medieval England.

Before the eleventh century, few coins existed in England and western Europe. The English upper classes used gold and silver valued by weight, and foreign coins were usually melted down and transformed into ingots. Feudal lords made their own coins for use only on their property, and serfs used a barter system for purchases within the community. But the Crusades

brought an economic change, for crusaders needed money that would be accepted in other lands. Silver was heavy, but gold coins were light and already in use throughout trade routes. The use of gold coins improved the peasants' buying and selling power; instead of the barter system, they were now able to earn gold in exchange for their labor or goods. The minting of coins was essential in the revival of England's economy.

Chivalric codes governed hand-to-hand combat during much of the Middle Ages. But the use of guns and gunpowder (and strategic military planning) changed all that. Discovered by the Chinese, gunpowder was introduced into English warfare around 1325. By 1346, warfare in the Western world had changed irreversibly. In

**The Hundred Years' War (1337–1453): The arrow is mightier than the armor.** What might be called the first national war was waged by England against France. Fought on the Continent, the Hundred Years' War was based on dubious claims to the throne of France by two English kings—Edward III (reigned 1327–1377) and Henry V (reigned 1413–1422).

This long war was militarily unsuccessful for the English. But it was an important factor in the gradual development of a British national consciousness. After the war, the English were no longer best represented by the knight in shining armor, an import from the Continent anyway. Instead, they were more accurately represented by the green-clad yeoman (small landowner) with his longbow. These English yeomen had formed the nucleus of the English armies in France. Their yard-long arrows could fly over castle walls and pierce the armor of knights. These small landowners now became a dominant force in the new society that grew out of the ruins of feudalism. The old ideals of chivalry lived on only in stories, such as the King Arthur tales retold by Sir Thomas Malory.

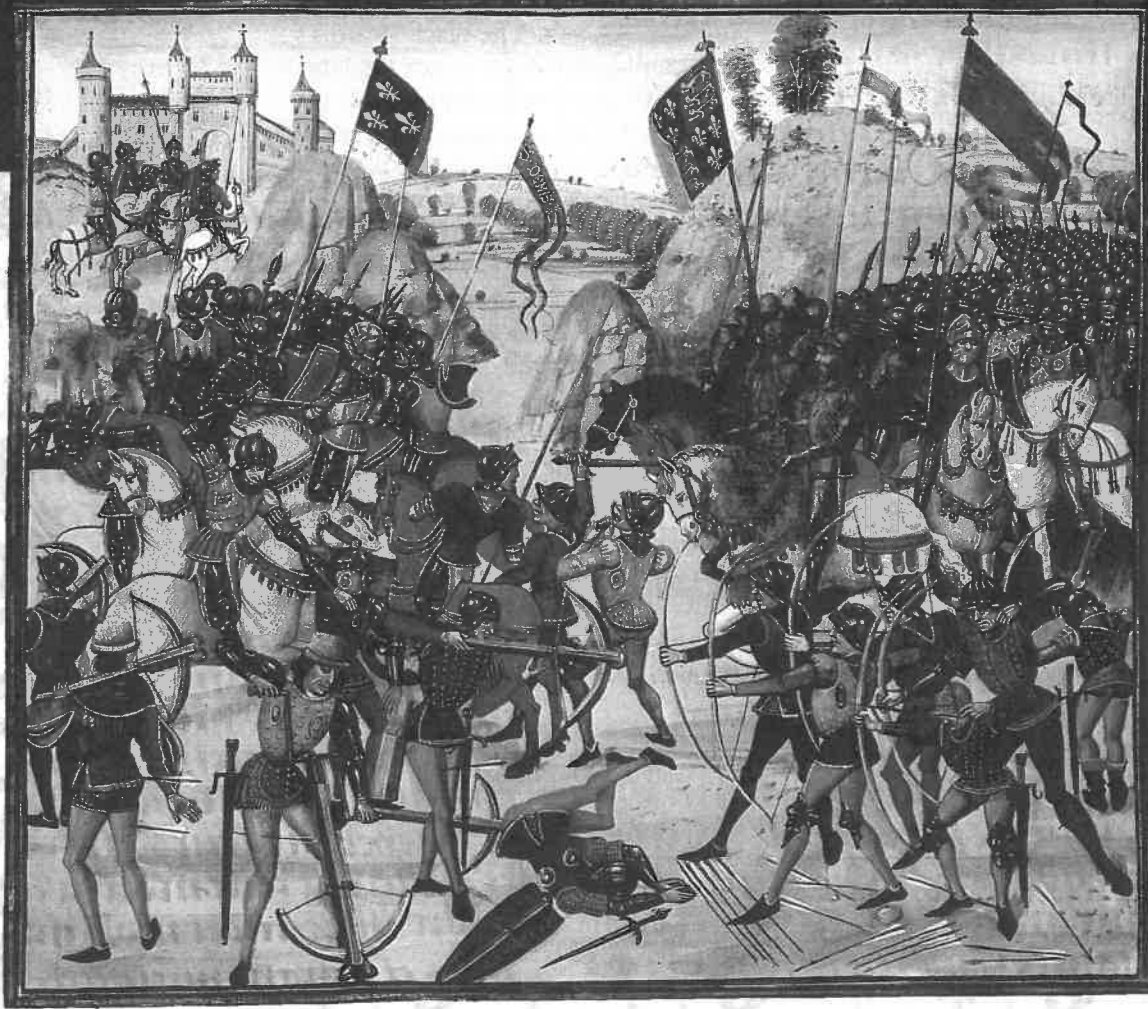
***The English lost the Hundred Years' War with France, but by the war's end the yeomen (small landowners) who had formed the nucleus of the English armies had replaced the knights in armor. With this emergence of the yeoman class, modern, democratic England was born.***

Marble relief (13th century) of mounted knight arrayed in casque and shirt of mail, carrying shield, from the monastery of Poblet, Province of Tarragona, Spain.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Dodge Fund. 1913 (13.21).

the landmark battle of Crécy, the French outnumbered the English. The English, aided by the longbow and by explosives, massacred their opponents. Over the next two hundred years, the cannon made the castle—previously impregnable—open to attack.

The rules of war and class had changed. Chivalry was at an end, and feudal obligation became a thing of the past. As a result, a free and prosperous middle class developed, revolutionizing the country's social and economic systems.

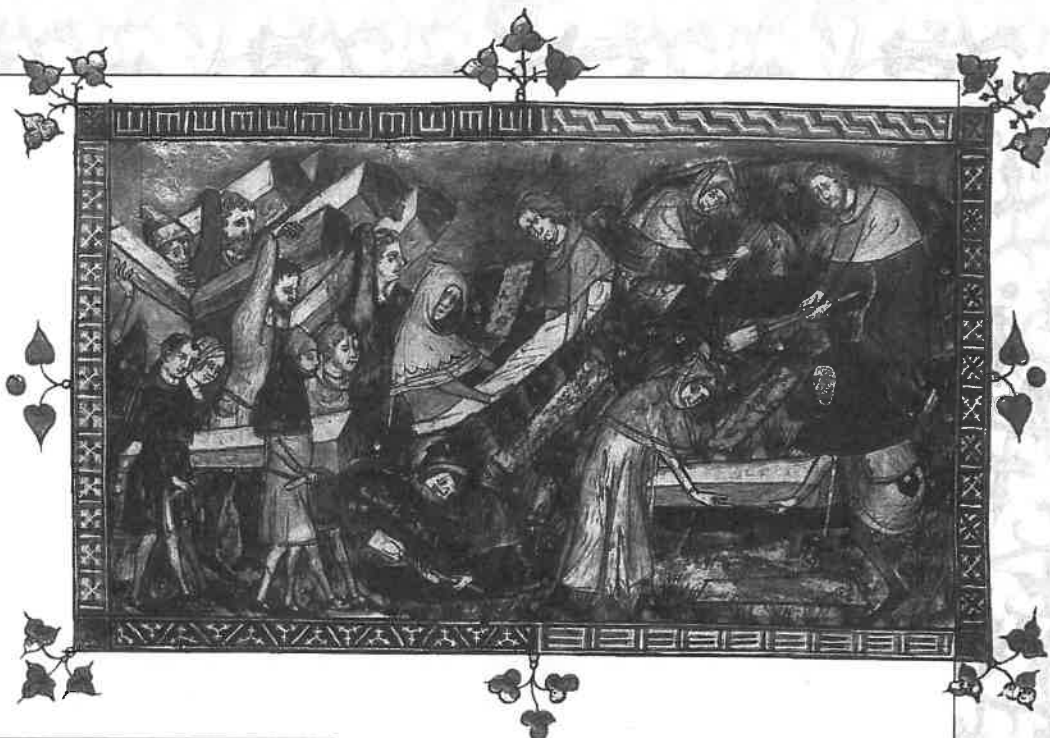


Battle of Crécy, from *Chroniques de Froissart* (detail) (14th century). English longbowmen are depicted overcoming French crossbowmen.

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*Coffin-Making and Burial During the Black Death*, from *Annales* (14th century) by Giles de Mussis (10¾" × 8").

© Bibliothèque Royale Albert premier, Brussels.



The character of the pestilence was appalling. The disease itself, with its frightful symptoms, the swift onset, the blotches, the hardening of the glands under the armpit or in the groin, these swellings which no poultice could resolve, these tumors which, when lanced, gave no relief, the horde of virulent carbuncles which followed the dread harbingers of death, the delirium, the insanity which attended its triumph, the blank spaces which opened on all sides in human society, stunned and for a time destroyed the life and faith of the world.

—Winston Churchill

**The Black Death.** The Black Death, or bubonic plague, which struck England in 1348–1349, delivered another blow to feudalism. Highly contagious and spread by fleas from infected rats, the disease reduced the nation's population by a third—causing a labor shortage and inevitably giving the lower classes more leverage than ever before against their overlords. One long-term result was the serfs' freedom, which knocked out feudalism's last support. By the time King Henry VII's 1486 marriage reconciled the warring Houses of York and Lancaster, the Middle Ages were ending in England. Henry, a strong king, began the Tudor line that would lead to Elizabeth I. England's Renaissance was about to begin.

***The Black Death caused a labor shortage, leading to the serfs' freedom and to the end of feudalism.***

### Quickwrite



Loyalty lay at the heart of the feudal system. The landowners extracted loyalty from their serfs, the lords expected loyalty from their knights, and the king demanded loyalty from everyone. Has loyalty remained as important in today's society? To whom, or to what, are you loyal, and why? Your answer might include institutions, like school or church, but does it also include ideas? Whom do you expect to be loyal to you, and in what ways? Jot down your thoughts on the issue to discuss with others in the class.

(Opposite)  
A master with his pupils, from the *Chronicles of Hainault* (15th century).