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The Age of Chivalry

TERMS & NAMES

- chivalry
- tournament
- troubadour

MAIN IDEA

The code of chivalry for knights glorified combat and romantic love.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Chivalry has shaped modern ideas of romance in Western cultures.

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, a code of behavior arose. High ideals guided warriors' actions and glorified their roles.

Background

The Muslims who invaded Spain in the 700s and established a civilization there were called Moors.

Warriors on Horseback

Mounted soldiers 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.

Saddles and Stirrups The leather saddle was developed on the Asian steppes around 200 B.C. Stirrups were developed in India around the same time. Both changed the technology of warfare in Europe during the 700s. The saddle kept a warrior firmly seated on a moving horse. Stirrups allowed him to stand up while riding and to maneuver 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. The horses they owned were status symbols. Warhorses played a key military role.

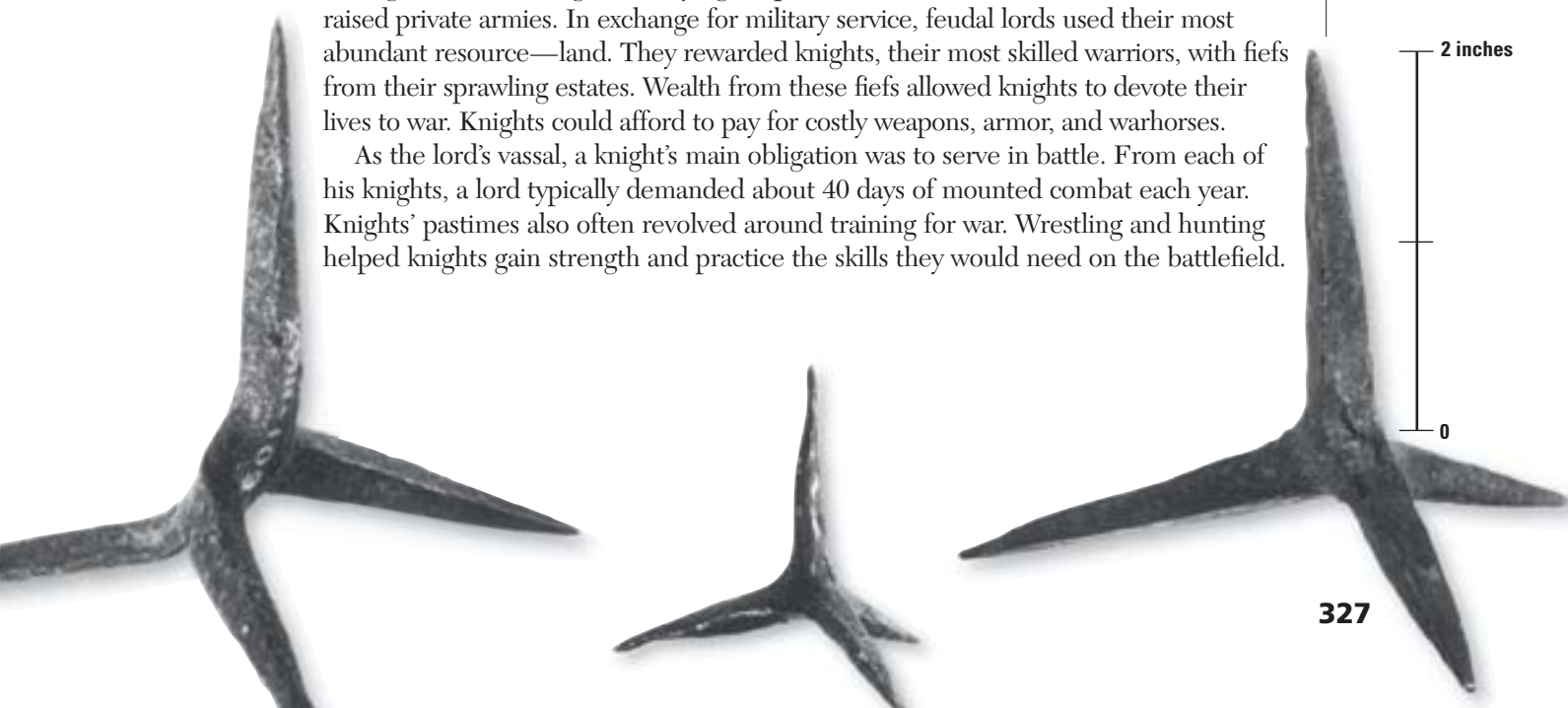
The Warrior's Role in Feudal Society By the 11th century, western Europe was a battleground of warring nobles vying for power. To defend their territories, feudal lords raised private armies. In exchange for military service, feudal lords used their most abundant resource—land. They rewarded knights, 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 each of his knights, a lord typically demanded about 40 days of mounted combat each year. Knights' pastimes also often revolved around training for war. Wrestling and hunting helped knights gain strength and practice the skills they would need on the battlefield.

These two-inch high iron spikes, called caltrops, were strewn over a battlefield or in front of a castle. They could maim galloping warhorses or enemy foot soldiers.

2 inches

0





Education of a Knight



PAGE The education of a young noble began early. At age 7, his parents sent him off to the castle of another lord. As a page, he waited on his hosts and learned courtly manners. He played chess to learn war strategies. To develop fighting skills, the page practiced sword fighting.

SQUIRE At around age 14, the page was raised to the rank of squire. A squire acted as a servant to a knight. The squire took care of the knight's armor, weapons, and warhorse. The squire also escorted the knight to battles.



KNIGHT At around age 21, a squire became a full-fledged knight. An English squire might have heard his lord say these words during the knighting ceremony: "In the name of God, Saint Michael, and Saint George, I dub thee knight. Be valiant."

Knighthood and Chivalry

Early in the Middle Ages, 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 these high standards. They treated the lower classes brutally.

A cowardly knight who disregarded the code of chivalry faced public shame. First, his armor was stripped off, and his shield was cracked. Next, his spurs were cut off, and his sword was broken over his head. People then threw the knight into a coffin and dragged him to church. There a priest would chant a mock funeral service.

War Games for Glory Sons of nobles began training for knighthood at an early age and learned the code of chivalry. After being dubbed a knight, most young men traveled with companions for a year or two. The young knights gained experience fighting in local wars. Some knights 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.

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, stone castles were encircled by massive walls and guard towers. These castles dominated much of the countryside in western Europe. The castle was the home of the lord and lady, their family, knights and other men-at-arms, and servants. It 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.

Background

The word *chivalry* comes from the French words *cheval* (horse) and *chevalier* (horse-riding knight).

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Comparing How do medieval tournaments resemble modern sports competitions?

Vocabulary

siege: a military blockade staged by enemy armies trying to capture a fortress.



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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

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

Mangonel

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

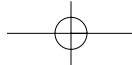
Connect to History

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

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R16

Connect to Today

Researching Modern technology has made warfare far less personal than it was during the Middle Ages. Find examples of recent weapons. Describe how they affect the way war is conducted.



The Literature of Chivalry

In the 1100s, the themes of medieval literature downplayed the brutality of knight-hood 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 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 of the early Middle Ages, 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:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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 poet-musicians at the castles and courts of Europe. They composed short verses and 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. 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 Richard the Lion-Hearted and King John. Richard himself composed

romantic songs and poems. Eleanor's daughter, Marie of Champagne, turned love into a subject of study like logic or law. She presided at a famed Court of Love. Troubled lovers came there to air their grievances.



Medieval musicians often played a harp or a lute, like the one shown here, to accompany recitals of poems celebrating warrior-heroes.

CONNECT to TODAY

Modern Love Songs

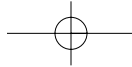
Many love songs played on the radio or cable TV share similarities with the love songs of troubadours from the 1100s and 1200s. Modern lyrics echo themes featured in troubadours' songs—happiness and heartbreaks, devoted lovers and unfaithful lovers, trust and jealousy.

The titles of modern love songs reflect the legacy of medieval troubadours' songs. Here are some examples:

- "Heartbreaker"
- "True Love"
- "Your Cheatin' Heart"
- "Power of Love"
- "Can't Help Falling in Love"

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Making Inferences How was the code of chivalry like the idea of romantic love?



The Shifting Role of Women

The Church viewed women as inferior to men. In contrast, the idea of romantic love placed noblewomen on a pedestal where they could be worshipped. A true knight pledged to protect all women. He also might love, serve, and adore a particular lady, preferably from afar.

Yet as feudalism developed across western Europe, women's status actually declined. Their roles became increasingly limited to the home and convent.

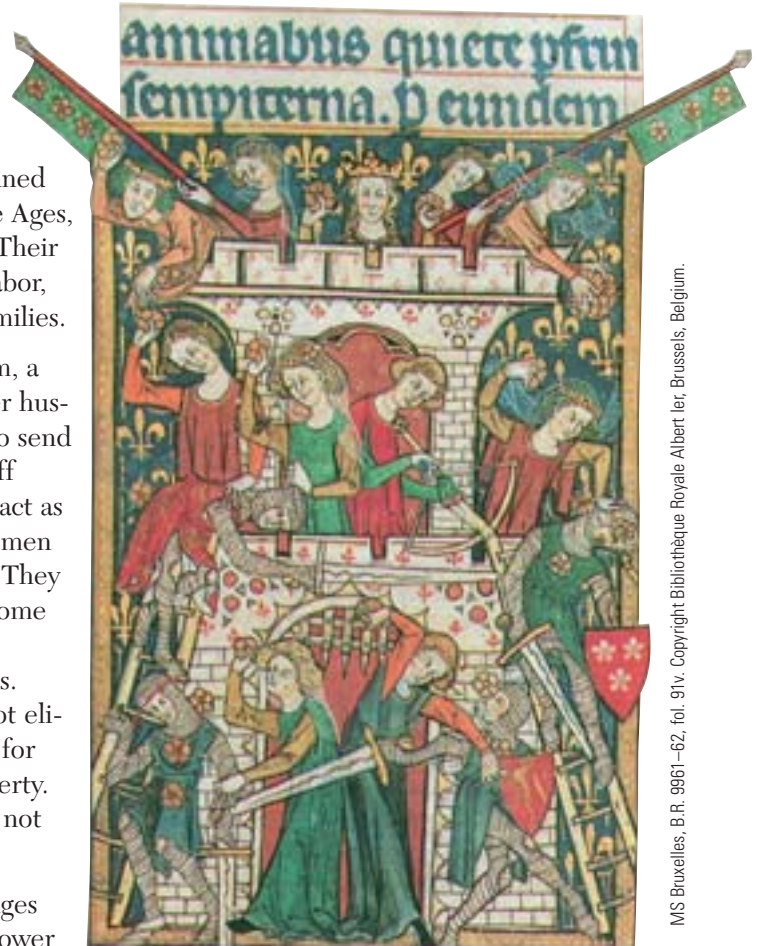
For the vast majority of women life remained unchanged for centuries. During the Middle Ages, most women were still poor and powerless. Their roles were confined to performing endless labor, bearing children, and taking care of their families.

Women in Power 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. Noblewomen often played a key role in defending castles. They hurled rocks and fired arrows at attackers. Some women even dressed in armor, mounted warhorses, and mobilized a cavalry of knights.

However, unlike knights, women were not eligible to receive land as reward in exchange for military service. Women also held less property. Lords passed down their fiefs to their sons, not their daughters.

Women's Falling Status As the Middle Ages progressed, noblewomen wielded less real power than they had in earlier years. Eleanor of Aquitaine was a notable exception. As queen of England, she ruled at times for her husband, Henry II, and later for her sons, Richard and John. Few other women had such authority.

The Church played a part in medieval women's declining fortunes. The Church tried to regain control of religious appointments and organizations. It reclaimed convents and monasteries that noblewomen had founded or supported. As you will read in Section 4, the influence of the Church was far-reaching.



MS Bruxelles, B.R. 9961-62, fol. 91v. Copyright Bibliothèque Royale Albert Ier, Brussels, Belgium.

Knights were not the only warriors glorified in medieval paintings. These noblewomen show their courage and combat skills in defending a castle against enemies.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

C. Summarizing

What privileges did noblewomen have in medieval society?

Section 3 Assessment

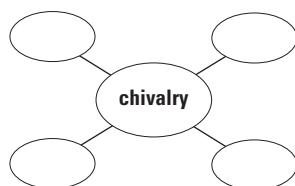
1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- chivalry
- tournament
- troubadour

2. TAKING NOTES

Using a web diagram like the one below, show ideas associated with chivalry.



Which have remnants in today's society? Explain.

3. FORMING OPINIONS

Do you think the idea of romantic love helped or hindered women? Why?

THINK ABOUT

- pros and cons of placing women on a "pedestal"
- the Church's view of women
- the lyrics of love songs quoted in the text

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Religious and Ethical Systems

What positive effects might the code of chivalry have had on feudal society?

THINK ABOUT

- the ideals of chivalry
- the education of a knight
- the importance of religious faith
- the violence and constant warfare during the Middle Ages