

WHAT WERE MEDIEVAL KNIGHTS?



Knights were a class of warriors in the Middle Ages who served lords and monarchs in military matters. Knighthood was more than a military role; it was a social rank and a lifestyle. Knights participated in tournaments and jousts, which were popular social events as well as opportunities for demonstrating martial prowess.

Over time, the ideals of knighthood and chivalry became romanticized, contributing to the iconic image of the knight as a noble and gallant warrior.

Historical development of the knight
The knight was a medieval warrior who fought on horseback. He was

heavily armored and carried a sword and shield.

The evolution of the knight began before the Middle Ages, with origins traceable to the 8th century under Charlemagne.

Knights became more significant as mounted warriors during the 10th and 11th centuries.

Knights were at the heart of the feudal system, a hierarchical structure that dominated Europe during the Middle Ages.

In exchange for their military service, knights were granted lands (known as fiefs) from their lords, which they ruled and generated income from.

This system of mutual obligations bound together the social and political structure of the period.

Role in battle

The primary role of knights in battle was to fight on the front line and protect other members of the army. They were also used to pursue enemy troops who had been routed and could be effective in sieges and ambushes. The evolution of warfare, including tactics, technology, and organization, contributed to changes in the role of knights in battle. One of these developments was the introduction of heavy plate armor, which made knights more resistant to sword blows and spear thrusts from enemies mounted on horses.

This new armor allowed knights to fight on foot, and the mounted knight became less important in battle.

Battle of Hastings in 1066

The Battle of Hastings in AD 1066 was a decisive battle between the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons.

The Norman knights, who were equipped with chain mail armor, proved to be a formidable force against the Anglo-Saxon troops, many of whom were only armed with shields and swords.

Knights played an important role in this battle, as they used a tactic known as 'feigned flight' to lure the Anglo-Saxons into a false sense of security before attacking them from behind.

This tactic was successful in defeating the Anglo-Saxons and led to the Norman conquest of England.

The code of chivalry



Knights were governed by a code of chivalry which dictated their behavior both on and off the battlefield.

The code of chivalry emphasized the importance of honor, courage, and loyalty. Knights were expected to protect the weak and innocent, and to show mercy to their enemies.

They were also forbidden from harming women and children or looting the possessions of those they had defeated in battle.

The Catholic Church helped develop this code because they saw the importance of having a moral code for warriors.

The Church saw the knight as an important

tool in their fight against heresy and believed that by upholding Christian values, knights would be more effective in battle. It's important to note that the chivalric code was not uniformly adhered to or implemented across all of Europe, and its interpretation could vary significantly.

Jousting and tournaments

Knights took part in jousting and tournaments to hone their skills in battle. These events were also seen as a form of entertainment for the general public, who would often gather to watch them take place.

Jousting was an event where two knights would charge at each other on horseback while holding shields and lances, with the aim of knocking the other person off their horse.

Tournaments were similar to jousting, but involved a number of knights fighting each other at the same time.



How to become a knight

In order to become a knight, one had to be born into a noble family and receive training in martial arts from an early age.

Young men could become a page at the age of seven and would serve a knight or lord (called a liege) in order to learn the skills necessary to become a knight.

It was not uncommon for a young man to be sent on a quest by his lord, in order to test his martial skills and bravery.

If he was successful, he would be given knighthood when deemed ready, as there was no specific age at which a person would become a knight.

Factors such as their training, experience, and the needs of their lord could influence the timing of their knighthood.

At this point, the young man would be knighted by his lord and given a suit of armor and weapons. Knights were expected to fight for their liege in battle but could also choose to become mercenaries who fought for whoever paid them the most money.

The Church was not supportive of this practice because they believed that knights should only fight for causes that were honorable and just, rather than just to earn money.

The knighting ceremony



One of the most important parts of becoming a knight was the ceremony in which he would receive his suit of armor and weapons.

This usually took place after many years of training and involved the following steps:

The young man receiving knighthood would be stripped down to their underwear, with all their clothing removed except for a belt.

The king or lord would use a sword to tap the young man on each shoulder, to officially bestow knighthood upon him.

The new knight would then typically promise to protect his king and his lands.

The young man would then be given a new set of clothing, including a suit of armor and a helmet. He would also be given weapons such as swords, lances, and shields. Finally, he would be presented to the public and ride around on horseback to show off his new rank and status as a knight.

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Decline of knights

Knights began to decline in importance during the 15th century when gunpowder and cannons became popular weapons for warfare.

These new weapons were much more effective than swords and lances because they could be used from far away without needing physical contact with an enemy soldier or knight.

The idea that only noblemen could become knights also meant that commoners were excluded from becoming one themselves.

This was unfair because many commoners wanted to fight in battles too but couldn't afford expensive suits of armor like their wealthy counterparts could.

As warfare continued to evolve, the role of knights became less prominent, and the concept of the knight gradually faded from importance