

MEDIEVAL KNIGHTS

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COURTLY LOVE



Like all forms of hunting, falconry was used to get meat for eating. It was also a very aristocratic sport and was often associated with romantic flirting between men and women.

As knights changed from gruff, warfaring soldiers into true members of a new aristocracy, they started to take an interest in the finer things of life. Their knightly codes of honor—so important when facing an enemy on the battlefield—took on a different meaning back at home. Chivalry became the code of the day, with an emphasis on high moral standards and courtly behavior toward women.

TREATMENT OF WOMEN

In medieval Europe, the idea that men should treat women as anything other than possessions would have sounded crazy. But crusaders returning from the Middle East learned something from their Muslim adversaries, who revered the women in their society. Knightly behavior gradually evolved into a more civilized, even romantic code of conduct.

COURTLY LOVE

Knights and squires were encouraged to worship a woman and to perform heroic deeds in her name. She, in turn, would praise his bravery as far as was considered proper. This displeased leaders of the church, however, who feared such frivolous behavior would distract the knights from their higher purpose of serving the church.

CHIVALRY

The idea of courtly love soon became part of the ceremonies and customs of knighthood, in a code of conduct called chivalry. **In addition to fighting for his lord and protecting the Church, a chivalrous knight was expected to be polite to women, to defend the weak, and to be truthful and honorable.**

Minstrels and music sometimes played a part in the knighting ceremony. The young Francis of Assisi is given the sword and spurs that mark his promotion to the status of knight, while minstrels play a form of lute and doubled flute.



LADIES AND MINSTRELS

The ideals of courtly love were spread by traveling singers called minstrels. They sang new love songs played on unusual musical instruments from the Middle East.

The songs were so popular that even the Church grudgingly changed its opinion, especially since some of the best songs were being written by monks and nuns.

NEW INSTRUMENTS

The minstrels of the 12th to 14th centuries had different names in different countries, but they all sang similar songs. In France they were called “troubadours” and in Germany “minnesingers.”

Their music changed over the years. At first it was played on simple instruments, like flutes and drums. Then travelers brought new ones from the East, such as the lute (similar to an Arabic instrument called an oud) or the viol (which was played with a bow and seems to have been brought from China by the Turks).

AN INTEREST IN ART

Quite suddenly it seemed that an almost barbaric western Europe was becoming interested in things other than warfare. In more peaceful areas, like England, many knights moved from being full-time warriors to being country gentlemen. They took more interest in governing their peasants, and in agriculture and business, than in military training. In places like France, Germany, and Italy, some knights and squires won fame as troubadours.

PATRONS

Once the ideals of chivalry had caught on, they encouraged an interest in art. The wealthier knights and nobles became patrons. Instead of using their wealth to build castles and fight wars, they began to pay artists, writers, poets, craftspeople, and academics to work for them. Many great religious works of art were paid for by knights and nobles.



The lute became a favorite instrument with minstrels. Its name comes from the Arabic “al-oud” which simply meant “the oud.”



As the knightly class got richer and life became more comfortable, young squires were often criticized for spending too much time on the latest troubadour songs and not working hard enough at their military training.