

## Power and Influence of the Church

At its peak, the Catholic Church would control approximately one third of all the land in Europe. This land, the people that they ruled, and the wealth that they both created made the Church wealthy and powerful. In addition to owning its own land and creating its own wealth, the church was allowed by many Kingdoms to tax people directly. A **tithe** is the term used to describe a 10% tax the Church collected on all wealth created in lands that the church either directly controlled or helped manage for others.



An image of a Medieval King and Bishop Sharing Power

The European Medieval period was a deeply **devote**, highly religious place. Christianity came to be the dominant religion replacing the polytheistic pagan beliefs of Roman and Early Middle Ages times.

People's belief and devotion was such that they didn't think to question what the priests said or did because most often the priests were the only ones who could read or offer an interpretation of the Bible. The ability to read and write was almost exclusive to those in the Church, so people simply believed what they were told.

This ability to read and write made the church not only an effective and efficient institution, it made it invaluable to any Kingdom or state. Priests would do more than just look after the spiritual needs of the people or perform marriages, baptisms, or funeral rights. The priests would often write, record and witness agreements which was the basis for political and business dealings. The Church became an integral part of medieval life.

During the Late Middle Ages, the Church also offered a sense of higher authority. Priests could point to the Bible and describe how a person should live their lives. People's fear of spending an eternity in Hell gave the Church great power and influence. If a person disagreed with what the Church was saying or doing, they could be threatened with **excommunication**. Excommunication was when the Church said a person would never go to Heaven and instead their soul would spend an eternity suffering unimaginably in Hell. Often the Church would only have to simply threaten to excommunicate someone like a king or a leader in order to get their way.

### **The Crusades**

Perhaps one of the best examples of the power and the influence the Church held over both the peasants and the nobles of Europe was the **Crusades**. The Crusades were a series of European invasions of the Middle East designed to free the Holy Land from the Muslims who came to power in that region during the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. Pope Urban II in 1095 called for the first Crusade and was able to attract warriors and armies from many different Kingdoms from all over Europe. The fact that Kingdoms who were normally fighting against each other, would

**Tithe** - a 10% tax collected by the Church for the Church on all wealth created by Christians.

**Devote** - to give all or a large part of one's time, energy and resources to a person, activity, cause or religion.

**Excommunication** - the act of forbidding a person to take part in church activities which often meant that a person's soul was condemned to Hell.

**Crusades** - the European military expeditions to the Middle East to reclaim the Holy Land from the Muslims.

**Logistics** - the detailed organization and planning involved in supplying and transporting the men and materials needed for war.

then team up at the Pope's command is significant and a reflection of both the Church's power and influence.

At the Council of Clermont in modern day France in 1095, Pope Urban II gave a rousing speech where he urged the Christian Kings and people of Europe to put aside their in-fighting and instead travel on a crusade to the Middle East, specifically Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, to free the holy land from the Muslims. This was a very important speech because it is in this speech that he makes a very special offer to all Christians who would wage war on non-Christians. Urban's offer was simple; fight for the church and all the immoral and evil deeds that you have done in life will be forgiven. It was, for all intents and purposes, the perfect "get-out-of-jail" card. Soldiers and peasants could travel to the Middle East, kill, rape and plunder and because they were doing it for the Church, it would all be forgiven.

The idea of a free trip to Heaven was very appealing and it was surprisingly easy to convince people to go. Not so surprising however, if you understand that the people of Europe were devote Christians and had never really had any reason to doubt the Church. One priest in particular who went by the name of Peter the Hermit, was particularly successful in convincing everyday people to join him on what came to be known as the People's Crusade.

The People's Crusade was made up of peasants, farmers, women and even children, who alongside soldiers and lesser knights followed Peter with his promise of a ticket to Heaven to the Middle East. While Kings of Europe were planning the **logistics** of organizing and supplying their armies for the long journey from Europe to the Middle East, Peter's followers, who had little money to buy supplies and lacked even the knowledge of where or how far the Middle East was, went ahead on their own. Along the way, the People Crusaders became hungry and at first decided to kill, rape and pillage whatever Jews or non-Christians they came across. The Crusaders would kill thousands of Jews on their way to free the Holy Land and as they got closer, they even started attacking fellow Christians. This was most notable in Hungary where they had to travel through in order to reach the Middle East. These People Crusaders were after all, poor and hungry and as long as they were fighting for the Church, they could do what they wanted and still be guaranteed a spot in Heaven.

Most Christian leaders were horrified at what was being unleashed upon Europe and fought against the People's Crusaders, often hiding or protecting Jews or their citizens but in the process, many only forfeited their own lives as the People's Crusaders became more and more successful in their destruction. The People's Crusaders would eventually be joined by the regular armies of Knights and Kings and it is the combination of these two crusading groups that successfully regain control of Jerusalem from the Muslims.



Peter the Hermit and the People's Crusade

Unfortunately for all concerned, the Muslims were not to be scared away and eight more Crusades would follow. Control over the Holy Lands would fall, back and forth, between the Muslims and the Christians for the next three centuries with countless lives being lost.

Power and Influence of the Church

**Directions:** READ the handout entitled; "Power and Influence of the Church" and then answer the following questions;

1. Use your handout to provide definitions for the following terms; (1 mark each)

Tithe            Devote            Excommunicate  
Crusades                            Logistics

2. On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions using **COMPLETE SENTENCES**;

- a. In your own words, describe how the church acquired so much wealth during the Middle Ages. What are some examples of what the priests did for the people of the Middle Ages? (2 marks for quality of response and inclusion of details)
  - b. In your own words describe two reasons why people would be so willing to travel to the Middle East to fight in a Crusade? (2 marks for the quality of your response and evidence of thought and effort)
  - c. In your own words, describe what type of people made up the People's Crusade explain why it could be considered to be not very "Christian" undertaking. (2 marks for quality of response and evidence of insight)
3. Offense or Defense? - Both in Europe and the Middle East, castle warfare defined battles in the Late Middle Ages, particularly during the Crusades. **Label and identify** the following weapons and fortifications as offensive or defensive weapons used in castle warfare (use a T-Chart??).

You will be marked out of 14 for accuracy, quality of work, and evidence of effort

Total: \_\_\_\_ /25

**Moat** - A ditch, usually filled with water, surrounding a castle. A drawbridge over the moat could be raised to prevent access to the castle.

**Tunnel** - Perhaps the surest way of weakening a castle wall. The tunnel was dug by men called sappers. The sappers propped the tunnel with timbers as they burrowed. When they reached the foundation, they removed stones until the wall was weak enough to collapse. Sometimes they set fire to the timbers causing the tunnel and the castle wall to collapse.

**Ballista** - A gigantic crossbow which required several men to operate. The ballista was very powerful and accurate. The word ballista came from the Greek word *ballein* meaning to throw. Ballistics is a modern term taken from the same word.

**Tower** - The tower was a roofed stairway on wheels. It was used to scale the high walls of a castle. It was usually covered with wet hides to prevent being set on fire. Towers could not be used where there was a moat, unless of course the moat was first filled in, which was sometimes done.

**Machicolations or Holes** - Overhanging parts of the castle walls called parapets contained holes. When the castle was under siege, from these holes stones were dropped, boiling oil and water was poured. Sometimes red hot iron bits were thrown on the men below.

**Battering Ram** - Widely used by the Romans, the battering ram continued to be popular well into the Middle Ages. It consisted of the largest and strongest tree trunk that could be found. The tree trunk was suspended on chains and housed in a shed with a roof on wheels. Sometimes the tip of the trunk was covered with metal spikes. As many as fifty men would swing the huge tree back and forth in its cradle against the castle wall. This usually went on nonstop until the wall was weakened and collapsed.

**Portcullis** - A device for protecting the entrance to the castle. The portcullis was a gate usually made of heavy wood and iron crossbars. It was pulled up and down by chins and slid in specially carved grooves

**Trebuchet** - This device operated like a giant seesaw. The short end was heavily weighted down with stones. Many men were required to pull down the long end which when released, fired a variety of unpleasant things such as huge stones, Greek fire (a burning mixture of chemicals, pitch and sulfur), or dead, decaying animals were shot over the castle walls. The trebuchet was powerful and accurate.

**Mangonel** - Usually shot heavy stones from a sling-like contraption (like a catapult). It was not very accurate, but worked on the same principle as the ballista.

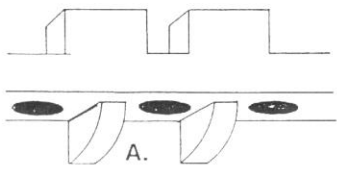
**Postern Gate** - A secret back gate to the castle. Its purpose was to allow the defenders to sneak out and surround their attackers.

**Rocky Ledge** - Castles built on rock could not be threatened by tunnels. Ridges also gave castles built on rocky ledges the advantage of height.

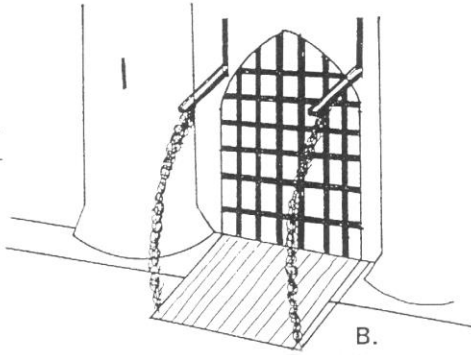
**Thick Walls** - It was not unusual for a castle to have walls ten or more feet thick.

**Murder Holes** - Holes in the flooring over the entrance just past the castle's front gate. If the attackers got through the gate, they were then assaulted by heavy objects dropped through the holes from the ceiling above them.

**Arrow-Loops** - Narrow openings in the tower of the castle just large enough for archers to fire their arrows on the enemy.



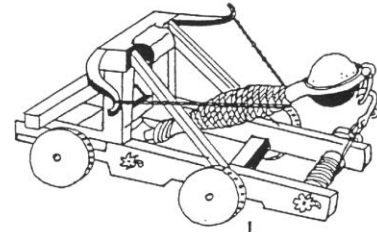
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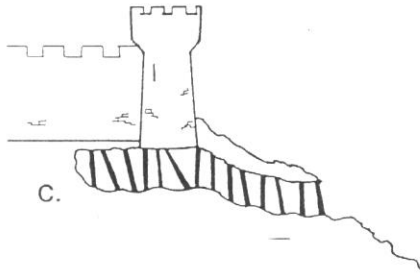
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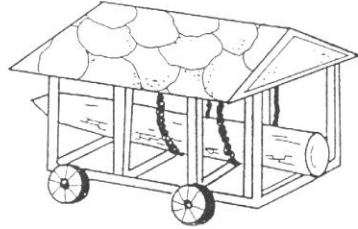
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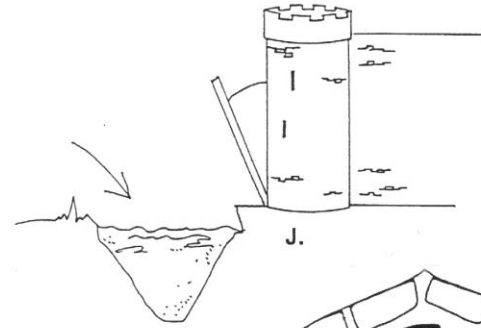
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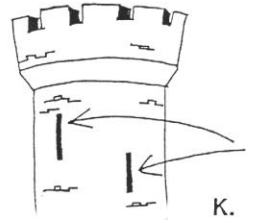
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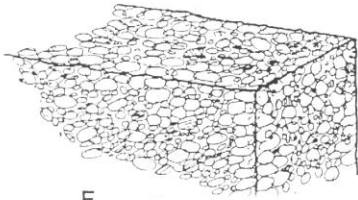
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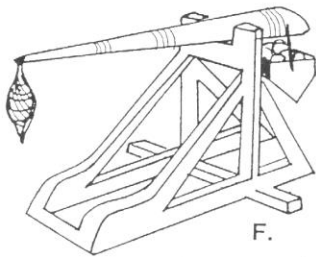
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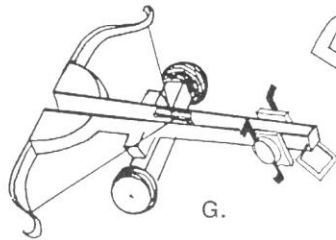
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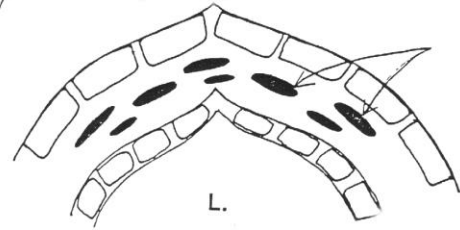
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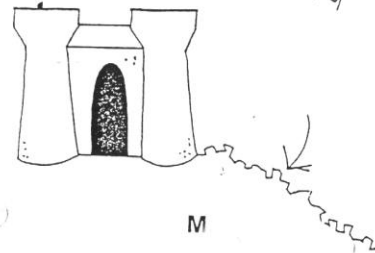
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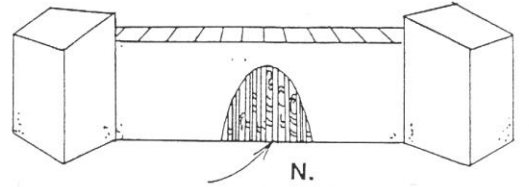
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