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# ABOUT THIS BOOK

Each double page contains a brief introduction, explaining the general subject, followed by key words arranged in alphabetical order. To look up a specific word, turn to the index at the back of this book: this will tell you which page to go to. If you want to learn more about a subject, take a look at the factfile, or follow the arrows to read related entries.



**INTRODUCTION**  
This explains the general subject and provides some basic knowledge.

**KEY WORDS AND ENTRIES**  
Key words are arranged alphabetically across each double page. Each entry provides a short explanation of what the key word means.

**A BRIEF HISTORY**  
The brief history provides a summary of the key events in this period.

## ISLAMIC EMPIRES

**D**uring the late 7th century the Islamic religion spread throughout Arabia. Islam's followers, known as Muslims, believe that their sacred book, the Qur'an (Koran), was dictated by Allah (God) to the Prophet Mohammed. Throughout the 7th century, Muslim armies seized control of their bordering countries, converting the people they conquered to Islam. Different regions were ruled by different Muslim leaders. The empires they ruled became centres of learning and the arts.

**Abbas, Shah (1571-1629)** The most famous of the Safavid rulers. He ruled from 1571 to 1629. Under his leadership, the Safavid army defeated the Ottomans.

**Akbar the Great (1542-1605)** A Mughal emperor who came to power in 1556 when he was just 13 years old. By the end of his reign, the Mughal Empire extended across most of central and northern India.

**Babur (1483-1530)** The founder of the Mughal Empire. He seized power after his victory at the Battle of Panipat in 1519, when his army defeated that of the Sultan of Delhi. Babur was the first of the six Great Mughals to rule the Mughal Empire.

**Baghdad** The administrative centre of the Abbasid Empire. Founded in 762, the city attracted scholars and artists from all parts of the empire. It was also an important trading city, with goods coming from as far away as China.

**Caliph** The civil and religious leader of an Islamic state. The word caliph means "successor" in Arabic. A government headed by a caliph was called a caliphate.

**Abbasid dynasty** A ruling family of caliphs. The Abbasid family seized control from the Umayyad dynasty in 750 and ruled Arabia until 1258. Under their rule, science and the arts flourished.

**Arab warriors on horseback**

**Harun al-Rashid (c.763-809)** The fifth Abbasid caliph, who governed from 786 to 809. His court was the setting for the One Thousand and One Nights, a famous collection of stories from Arabia, China, Egypt and India.

**Janissary** A soldier who fought for and protected the Ottoman sultan.

**Mohammed (570-632)** The founder of the Islamic religion. He was meditating in the mountains near Mecca when the angel Gabriel came to him and told him that there is only one God, Allah, and that he should become the prophet of Allah. As Mohammed gained popularity, officials in Mecca began to distrust him. In 622 he and his followers fled to Medina, where they united the local tribes and led them on to conquer Mecca.

**Safavid dynasty** A ruling family that governed Persia (modern-day Iran) from 1501 to 1722. The Safavids gained power throughout the 1500s. Their empire began to decline after the death of Shah Abbas. In 1722, it was overrun by armies from Afghanistan.

**Shah** The title given to Persian and Mughal rulers. In ancient Persian the word shah means "king of kings".

**Suleiman (1494-1566)** One of the most famous Ottoman sultans. He was known as Suleiman the Law Giver, or the Magnificent. He ruled from 1520 to 1566. Under Suleiman, the Ottoman Empire expanded and arts, literature, education and architecture flourished.

**Sultan** The political leader, or king, of an Islamic state. The lands ruled by a sultan are called the sultanate. The most famous sultans were those of the Ottoman Empire, who lived in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul.

**Taj Mahal** A domed, marble building, ordered by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as a tomb for his wife Mumtaz. Work on the tomb started in 1632 and continued for 22 years. It stands on the banks of the Yamuna River near Agra in India.

**The Sultan of Delhi receiving visitors in the 1300s**

**Mughal Empire** An Islamic empire that ruled most of India from 1526. The Empire declined in the early 18th century, and parts of it came under the rule of the British Raj (1757-1947). The Mughal rulers, called the Great Mughals, were Muslims but most of their subjects were Hindus.

**Ottoman Turks** A group of tribes that settled in present-day Turkey in the 1300s. They conquered the surrounding lands. By the 1600s, the Ottoman Empire was the largest in the world, covering much of Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Defeat in World War I (1914-1918) led to the collapse of the Empire in 1922.

**Muslim prayer meetings**

**Umayyad dynasty** The first of the Muslim ruling families. Their rule reached as far west as Spain, and deep into Central Asia in the east. The Umayyad dynasty governed from 661 to 750, when the Abbasids seized control.

**The Royal Mosque in the Safavid capital city of Isfahan**

**A BRIEF HISTORY**

- ★ 570-632 Life of the Prophet Mohammed.
- ★ 630-700 Arab armies spread Islam throughout North Africa.
- ★ 660-750 Umayyad dynasty holds power.
- ★ 711 Muslim armies conquer part of Spain.
- ★ 750-1025 Abbasid dynasty holds power.
- ★ 1025-1220 Rule of the Ottoman Empire.
- ★ 1501-1722 Safavid dynasty rules Persia.
- ★ 1519-1666 Rule of Suleiman over the Ottoman Empire.
- ★ 1526 Mughal Empire founded by Babur at the Battle of Panipat.
- ★ 1526-1606 Mughal Empire rules India.
- ★ 1556-1605 Reign of Akbar the Great over the Mughal Empire.
- ★ 1571-1629 Rule of Shah Abbas over Safavids.
- ★ In Turkey, whirling dervishes dance at Muslim prayer meetings.

**BOLD WORDS**  
These highlight useful words that do not have their own entry.

**ARROWS**  
These arrows show you where to look up other words mentioned in the entry. For example, (→ 26) tells you to go forward to page 26 and (← 6) tells you to turn back to page 6.

**PAGE NUMBER**  
Page numbers are easy to find at the side of the page.

# VIKINGS

**T**he Vikings, or Norsemen, were seafaring people who came from the Scandinavian countries of northern Europe (modern-day Denmark, Norway and Sweden). Between the 8th and 11th centuries, the Vikings raided and looted many parts of Europe. They were also colonizers, founding settlements in regions such as Iceland and Greenland. Viking ships even sailed as far as North America. Most Vikings were farmers, who grew crops and kept cattle. They were also skilful craftsmen.

**Althing** The governing assembly of Iceland. The *althing* met every summer in Thingvellir and lasted for two weeks. It first met in 930.

**Berserker** A famously fierce Viking warrior. Berserkers prepared for battle by wearing bearskin shirts and working themselves up into a rage. This fit of fury was called “going berserk”.

**Chieftain** The leader of a village or of a group of Vikings.

**Danegeld** A tax paid to Viking raiders. Areas threatened by the Vikings could pay this to stop the Vikings from robbing them, abducting people or destroying their land.



Viking raiders on board a longship.

A Viking farm



**Eric the Red (950–c.1003)** Viking chieftain who founded the first settlement in Greenland. He was exiled from Iceland in 982 and sailed in search of new lands. He returned to Iceland three years later with tales of a new “green land” and encouraged others to follow him there.

**Frey** The Viking god of fertility and birth. He helped the crops to grow and blessed newly-wed couples.

**Futhark** The Viking alphabet, named after its first six letters: f, u, th, a, r and k.

**Greenland** A large, ice-covered island in the North Atlantic. Vikings discovered it 982. Settlements formed inland in the east and west, the only areas that could be farmed.

**Iceland** A large, volcanic island in the North Atlantic. Vikings discovered Iceland in 870. The first settlers travelled there to escape the rule of King Harald of Norway.

**Jarl** A nobleman. Jarls were the highest of the three classes of Viking society.

**Karl** A freeman. Karls were the middle of the three classes of Viking society, and the largest. They worked as farmers, traders, craftsmen and warriors.

A craftsman carving a figurehead



**Knarr** A wide ship used to carry goods for trading. Knarrs were mostly powered by their sails but could be rowed if the wind dropped. They were slower than longships.

**Leif Ericsson (c.970-1020)** A Viking explorer who landed on the coast of North America in 1000. He was the first European to set foot on North American soil. Ericsson established a settlement, but it was abandoned after a few years.

**Longship** A fast wooden ship used to carry warriors into battle. It was powered by a square sail or by oarsmen. The front of a ship was often carved into the shape of a dragon's head. For this reason the boats were sometimes called “dragon ships”.

**Odin** Chief of the Viking gods. Odin was god of wisdom, war, death and magic. The Vikings believed he was a sorcerer who could change his shape at will.

**Rune** A Viking letter. Runes were formed of straight and diagonal lines, which were easy to carve into wood or stone.

A runestone



**Runestone** A stone carved with runes, used to mark boundaries or glorify an ancestor's bravery in battle. Some runestones were highly decorated.

**Rus** A group of Vikings who travelled to Russia in the 9th century, either as invaders or as peacekeepers, to sort out quarrels between the Slav people. They settled in the area around Kiev, which became known as the “land of the Rus”. This is probably where the name Russia comes from.

**A Viking raid of a monastery. Monasteries were perfect targets for the Vikings because they were often poorly defended and filled with treasures.**



**A noble Viking warrior carried a wooden shield and wore either chain mail or leather for protection.**

**Saga** A story about Viking history or mythology. Some sagas were about gods and monsters. Others were about family history and Viking victories. For hundreds of years the Viking's sagas were not written down, but passed down the generations by word of mouth.

**Thing** A meeting held in a community to discuss the law. All free men were allowed to express their opinions at the *thing*.

**Thor** The Viking god of law and order. He was thought to ride through the sky on a chariot pulled by goats.

**Thrall** A Viking slave. Slaves were often captured during the Viking's raids. They were the lowest of the three classes of Viking society.

**Valhalla** The Viking heaven for the souls of men that were killed in battle. Valhalla was believed to be a huge feast hall. In Viking mythology, the souls of those who died of death or old age went to a shadowy realm called **Hel**.

## A BRIEF HISTORY

- ★ **c.750** Vikings begin their raiding voyages in Europe.
- ★ **c.860** Swedish Vikings start to move east, to Russia.
- ★ **870** Iceland is discovered and Vikings begin to settle there.
- ★ **930** The first meeting of the *althing* in Iceland.
- ★ **982** Eric the Red explores the coast of Greenland.
- ★ **c.985** The first Viking settlers move to Greenland.
- ★ **1000** Christianity becomes the official religion of Iceland.
- ★ **c.1000** Leif Ericsson sails to North America.
- ★ **1004-13** Viking settlement established in Newfoundland, North America.



**Valkyrie** Mythological female warriors. They were believed to choose who would die in battle and who would fight on.

**Varangian** The Viking merchants who travelled south and east from Scandinavia in the 9th and 10th centuries. They traded wheat, wool and slaves for silver and furs.

# CASTLES & KNIGHTS

In medieval times, a castle was a fortified building that served as a home for the king or a lord. Wars frequently broke out in medieval Europe so it was important that a lord could protect himself, his family and followers. A knight was someone who served a king or lord as a mounted soldier. During the Middle Ages, knights became a separate class of people, below the nobility in the feudal system (14), but above the merchants and craftworkers. Knights underwent years of training to learn fighting skills and were expected to protect the weak.

**Archery** A sport involving shooting with bows and arrows at a target.

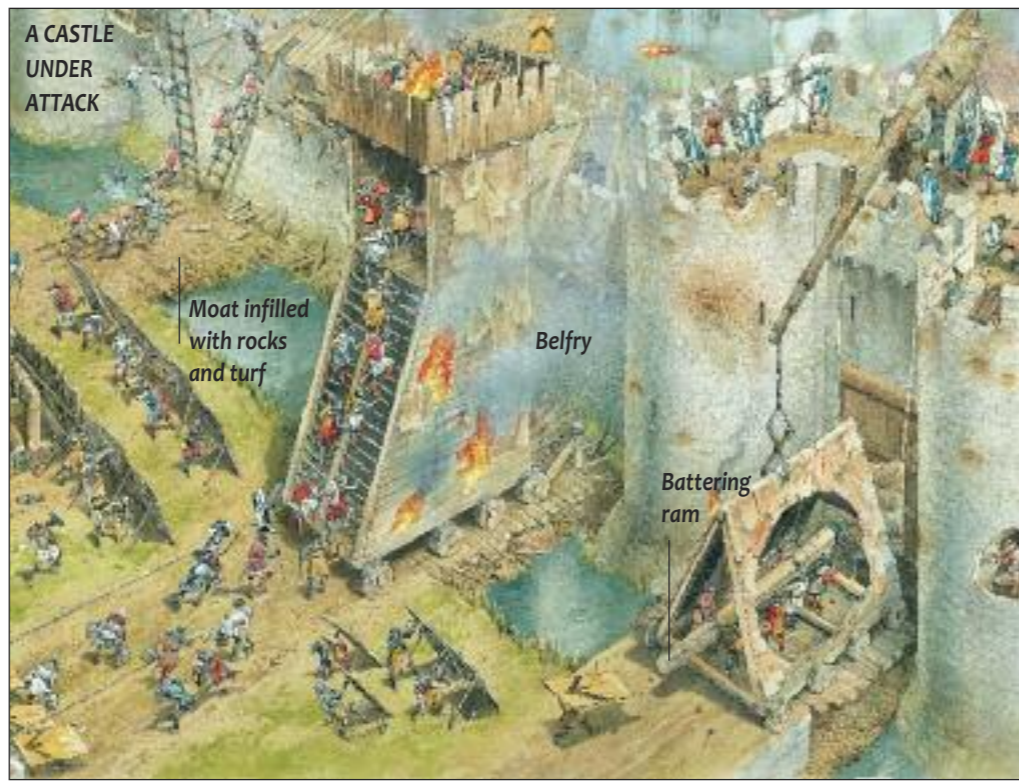
**Bailey** A courtyard within castle walls.

**Battering ram** A large beam used to break down walls or doors of a castle.

**Battlements** The top of a wall with a series of gaps, called crenelles, between raised portions. Battlements are also called **crenellations**. Archers could fire through the gaps to defend the castle.



A knight bearing his coat of arms



A CASTLE UNDER ATTACK

Moat infilled with rocks and turf

Belfry

Battering ram

**Belfry** A wooden tower on wheels, which attackers used to climb over castle walls during a siege.

**Chain mail** Heavy but flexible armour made from thousands of tiny metal rings linked together by hand.

**Chivalry** The behaviour expected of a knight, such as loyalty, bravery and honour. Knights were expected to defend the weak and show courtesy, especially towards women.

**Coat of arms** A shield marked with the symbols of a family. A knight would wear his coat of arms on his shield as a way of identifying himself in battle.

**Crossbow** A mechanical bow using short metal bolts rather than arrows.

**Curtain wall** The outer wall of a castle.

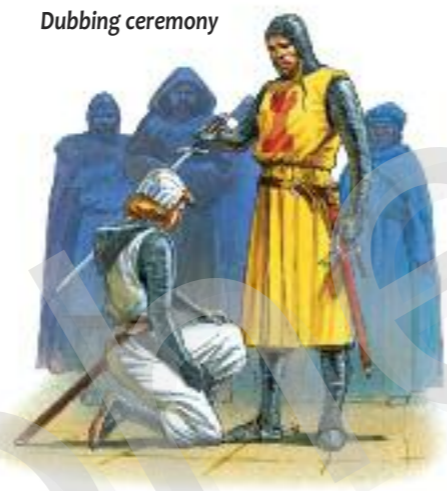
**Drawbridge** A bridge across a moat that could be lifted to prevent entry to a castle.

**Dubbing ceremony** The ceremony in which a squire became a knight.

The squire would kneel before his master, or the king, to receive a light tap on the shoulder with a sword and the words "I dub you knight".

**Gatehouse** A heavily fortified structure, built at the entrance to a castle. A drawbridge and a portcullis were part of a gatehouse's defences.

Dubbing ceremony



**Heraldry** The system used for designing coats of arms. Designs and colours often had meanings associated with the person who bore the arms.

**Hoardings** A wooden gallery attached to a castle wall with holes in the floor, through which defenders attacked the enemy.

**Jousting** An entertainment in which two knights tried to knock one another off their horse using a weapon called a lance. It was a test of bravery and skill.



Jousting tournament

**Keep** The fortified stone tower at the centre of some castles.

**Mangonel** A catapult used to throw missiles from close range. It was effective for smashing castle walls during a siege.

**Moat** A dry or water-filled ditch surrounding a castle.

**Motte-and-bailey** An early European castle formed of an earth mound (motte) topped by a keep, next to a fenced courtyard (bailey).

**Murder hole** An opening in the ceiling of the gatehouse through which defenders dropped missiles on enemies below.

**Page** A young boy who lived in a knight's household, learning the skills and behaviour expected of a knight. He would become a squire at the age of 15 or 16.

**Portcullis** A heavy wooden grating that could be slid down to close the gateway at the entrance of a castle.

**Siege** The surrounding of a castle by an enemy army.

**Squire** A young nobleman who acted as personal servant to a knight. He rode into battle with his master and learned how to fight. When his training was complete, he was ready to become a knight.

## A BRIEF HISTORY

★ **1000s** Motte-and-bailey castles are built across Europe.

★ **1096-1291** Many castles are built by Christian Crusaders (14) to protect the lands they win in the Middle East.

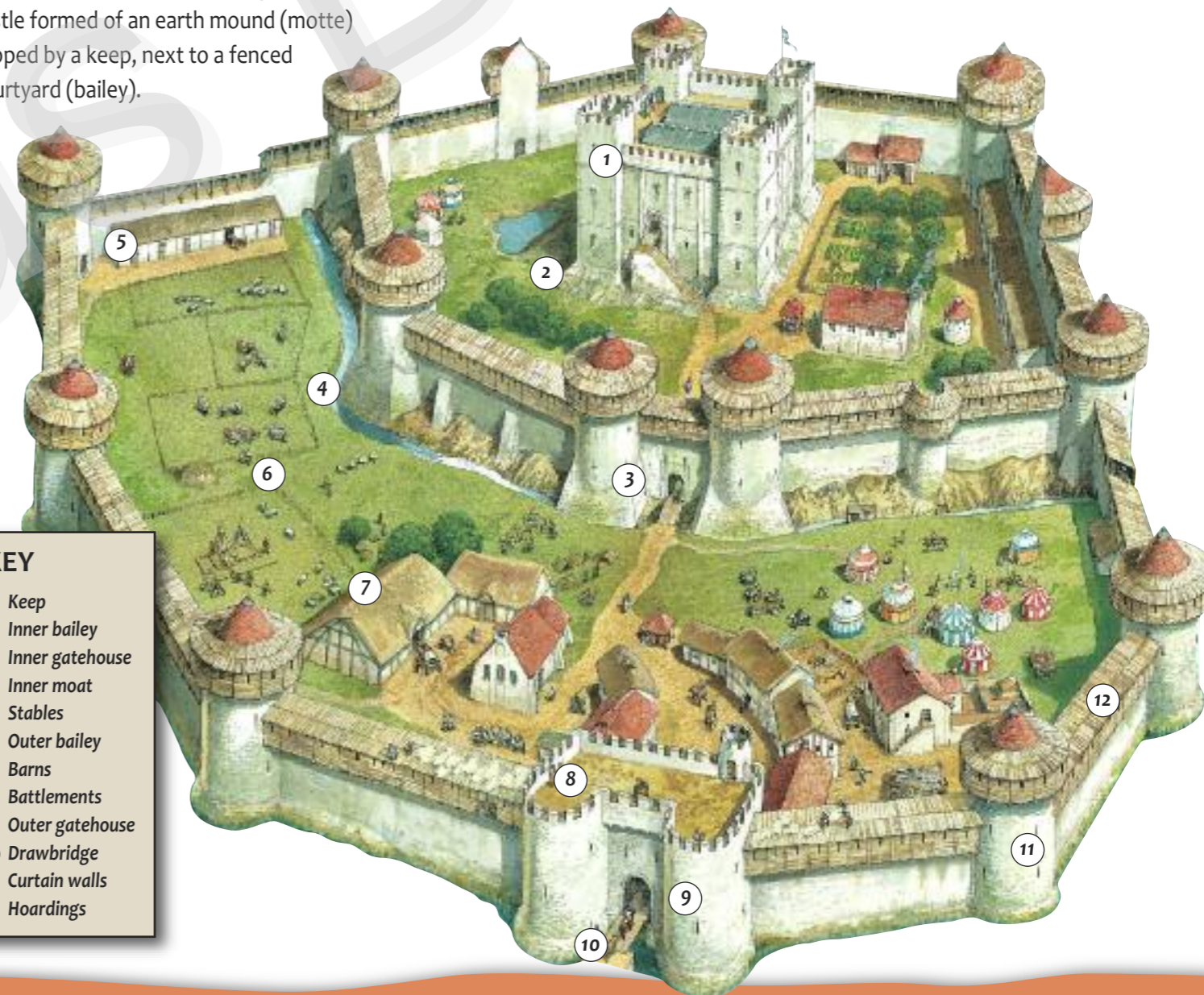
★ **1100s** Large stone keeps are developed.

★ **1150-1250** Period of major castle building in Germany.

★ **1200s** Features of crusader castles such as portcullises, curtain walls and rounded towers are introduced to European castles.

**Tournament** An event where knights jostled and acted and in mock battles.

**Trebuchet** A giant catapult that hurled missiles such as rocks, dead animals, or human heads into a castle during a siege.



### KEY

- 1 Keep
- 2 Inner bailey
- 3 Inner gatehouse
- 4 Inner moat
- 5 Stables
- 6 Outer bailey
- 7 Barns
- 8 Battlements
- 9 Outer gatehouse
- 10 Drawbridge
- 11 Curtain walls
- 12 Hoardings