



the world of the Medieval
N I G H T

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FOOD AND BANQUETS

In a medieval castle, mealtimes were different from those of today. For breakfast there was bread, washed down with ale or watered wine. Dinner, the main meal, was eaten at about ten or eleven in the morning, and supper between four and six o'clock. Some people also took another meal later on, accompanied by a great deal of drinking that sometimes continued until daybreak. The fourteenth-century banquet shown here marks an important event. On special occasions everyone ate together. There was a lot of food, drink and entertainment, because hospitality was admired. The lord, lady and guests sat at the high table set on a platform, the dais. Only those of great rank had chairs; everyone else had stools or benches. Most tables were on trestles so that they could be cleared away to make room for sleeping. Pages brought ewers, basins and napkins to wash the hands of the rich, while less important people used metal basins placed near the door. Everyone carried a personal knife, but forks were rare. Large slices of bread, or trenchers, were used as plates. These soaked up gravy, and any leftovers were given to the poor at the castle gate. Only the rich had actual plates made of pewter, silver or gold, and they did not share their food with anyone else. Roast meat was carved straight onto the trencher and people dipped the meat into saucers containing sauce. Bowls of thick meat stew were shared between two, each person fishing the meat out with his fingers. Thinner stews, sometimes made of fish, were also shared, but spoons were used. Even

goblets of wine and beer could be shared between two. The castle being proudly carried in the picture is a 'subtlety', a sugar and marzipan model made by the cook. However, sugar was expensive, so honey and fruit were often used.

