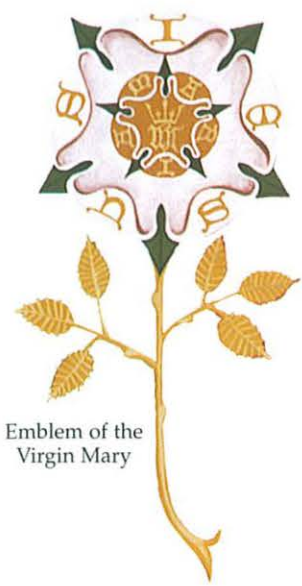


# Eyewitness MEDIEVAL LIFE

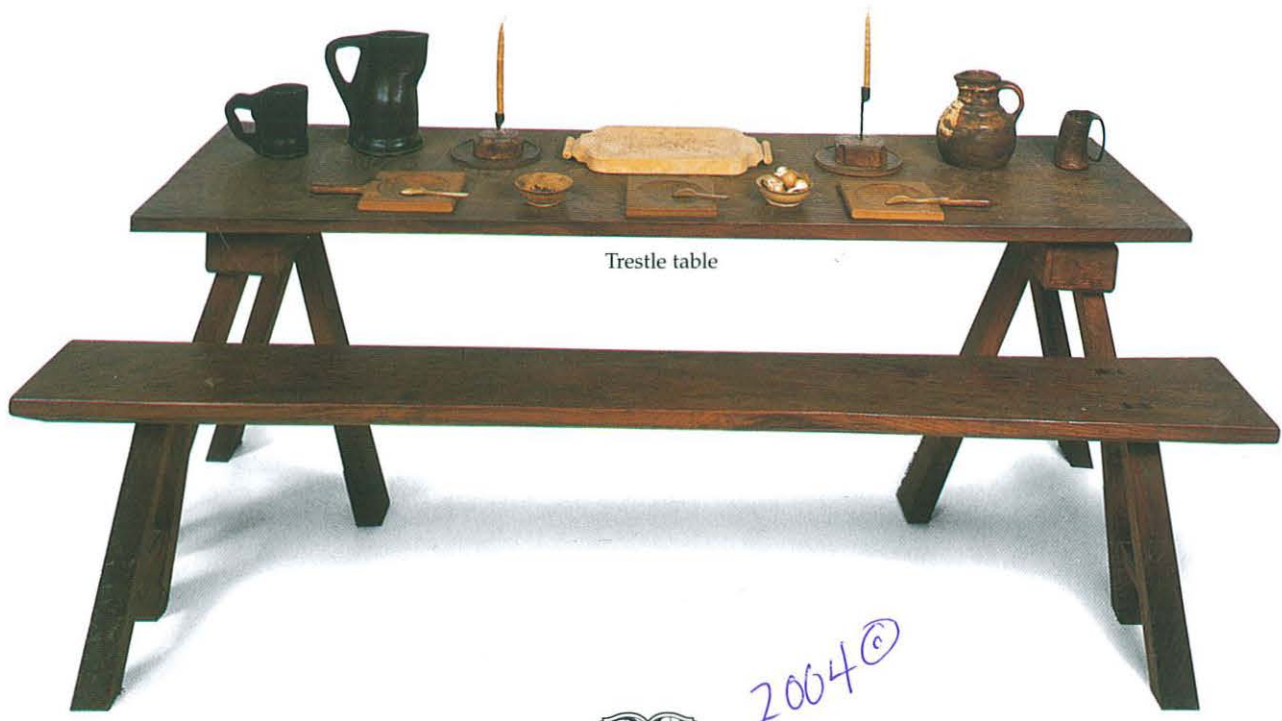


Emblem of the  
Virgin Mary



Medieval badge  
of Christ

Written by  
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Photographed by  
**GEOFF BRIGHTLING & GEOFF DANN**



Trestle table

2004 ©



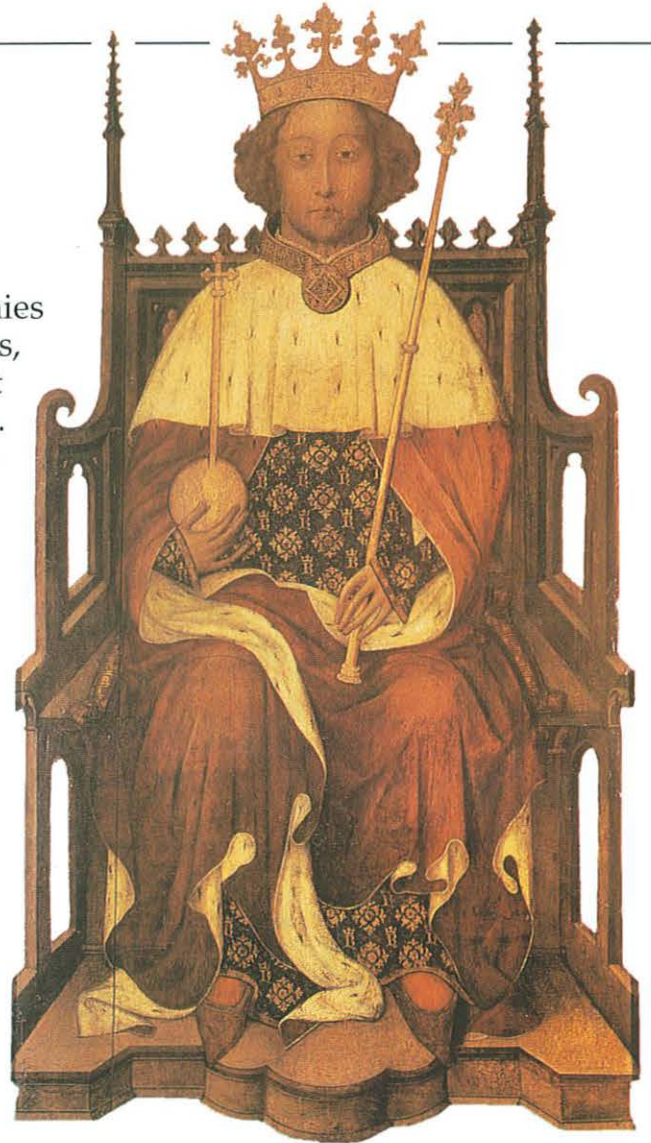
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# The royal court



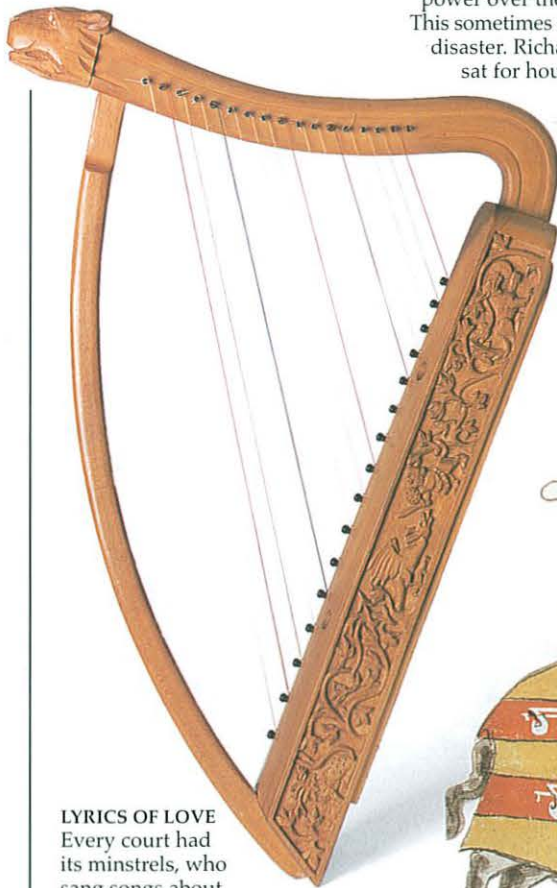
Love-heart decorated with tears

THE ROYAL COURT was the center and the showpiece of the kingdom. Here a monarch demonstrated his power with grand ceremonies and banquets, collected taxes, settled disputes, and made laws. It was particularly important to maintain control over the powerful barons. Henry II of England (1133–1189) held special court sessions to sort out arguments over land-holding, and Louis IX of France (1214–1270) insisted on listening to cases in person. Other monarchs amazed their subjects and visitors alike with the magnificence of their courts. Most astounding of all were the Sicilian castles of the Holy Roman Emperor (p. 8) Frederick II (1194–1250), which had golden floors, exotic animals, beautiful gardens, and dancing girls.



## THE RIGHT TO RULE

Most medieval kings believed they had absolute power over their subjects, given to them by God. This sometimes led them to arrogant gestures – and disaster. Richard II of England (1367–1400) once sat for hours on his throne, glancing around. He merely wanted to watch his courtiers kneel when he looked at them. By 1399, Richard's despotic ways had made him so unpopular that he was deposed from his throne.



## LYRICS OF LOVE

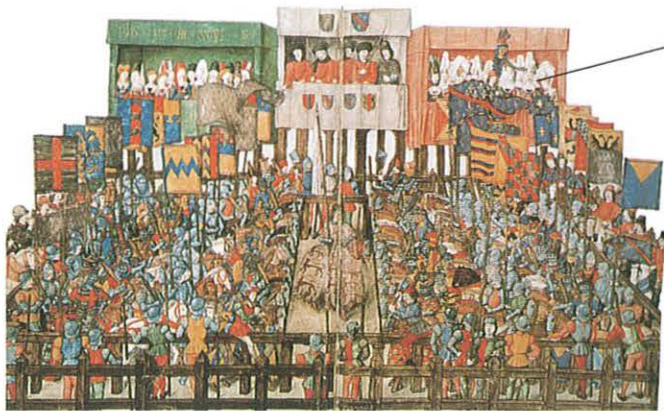
Every court had its minstrels, who sang songs about love and brave deeds, accompanying themselves on the harp or the lute (p. 44). The greatest love songs were written by the troubadours, who flourished in southern France in the 12th century. Each troubadour wrote in praise of his idealized lady love.

Lances measure about 13 ft (4 m)



## LANCE A LOT

To rebel against the king was equivalent to defying God, but if a king was weak or poor, his powerful barons could be troublesome (pp. 24–25). Monarchs were eager to lure their noblemen to court, where they could keep an eye on them. One great attraction was the joust, a contest of fighting skills. Here, two armored knights canter toward each other, their lances held before them. The object was to hit your opponent on the head or chest and knock him off his horse.



Court ladies watch the tournament from the stand

Glittering shield may have been presented as a tournament prize

**WAR GAMES**

Pomp and ceremony were important parts of court life. The tourney, or mock battle, was a popular and spectacular way of amusing the court in the 11th century. While the king, queen, and courtiers looked on, large parties of knights charged at each other. If they were unhorsed, they went on fighting on foot. Tourneys were bloody and dangerous: during one fight at Cologne, more than 60 knights were killed.



"Tables" counter for playing a game similar to backgammon

**IDLE PASTIMES**

The lords and ladies of the court whiled away idle hours with indoor games such as backgammon, chess, and dice. Playing cards became popular in the 13th century.



**OFFICIAL BUSINESS**

The king made his wishes known through writs. His scribe's office produced hundreds of documents each year granting lands, and permission to raise armies, appoint officials, and order the payment of taxes. This writ, dated 1291, is a grant of game rights from Edward I of England (1239–1307) to one of his barons, Roger de Pilkington.



The royal seal makes the document official

**A COURT OF LOVE**

In the 12th century, courtly love became fashionable in royal circles. It was an artificial kind of passion, with strict rules. It had to be kept a secret, and the loved one had to be married – to someone else. Noble knights worshiped their ladies from afar, wrote long love poems, and vowed to do brave deeds for love. This parade shield shows a knight kneeling before his lady and bears the motto, "You, or Death."



15th-century Flemish shield