



About the Exhibition

Medieval Europe – Power and Splendour is a travelling exhibition developed by the world-renowned British Museum in London, England, with enhanced content produced by the Canadian Museum of History for the North American leg of the tour. Prior to arriving at the Canadian Museum of History, the exhibition was presented in Spain at the CaixaForum Zaragoza, the CaixaForum Madrid and the CaixaForum Barcelona, and at the Queensland Museum in Australia.

Covering the period from approximately A.D. 400 to 1500, the exhibition features more than 200 artifacts and works of art mostly from the extensive collections of the British Museum. These artifacts have never been presented in Canada.

The content has been expanded by the Canadian Museum of History to include a section on the legacy of medieval Europe in Canada. Visitors will discover this legacy in neo-Gothic architecture, laws and more.

The exhibition has been designed to evoke a medieval castle and its environs. As they enter, visitors step back in time, making their way through a castle's great hall, chapel, courtyard and gardens. As they leave the castle walls, visitors enter a busy street in a fortified town, completing their tour of the exhibition in a zone devoted to exploring the legacy of the Middle Ages in modern Canada.

The exhibition is divided into eight zones, as described below.

Zone 1: Introduction

As visitors enter this introductory zone, they are invited to step back in time to explore more than 1,000 years of history. This zone provides a brief overview of the period being covered, approximately A.D. 400 to 1500, from the decline of the Western Roman Empire to the Protestant Reformation.

Zone 2: The Formation of Europe

Following the decline of the Western Roman Empire, which began around A.D. 400, people began migrating to new areas where they formed communities, then kingdoms. This zone offers an overview of medieval Europe as rulers emerged, communities formed, trade networks expanded, and art and craftsmanship began to flourish. It also

explores the emergence of a knightly class and the importance of military strategy in Europe's ongoing evolution.

Zone 3: Royal Power

As the Western Roman Empire declined, new leaders began filling the vacuum. Medieval kings and queens ruled with absolute power, often claiming divine right. Celebrated names such as Charlemagne, William the Conqueror, Louis XI and Richard the Lionheart built palaces, went on Crusades and broadened their influence through war, intermarriage and trade. This zone explores the power and authority of medieval monarchs and their role in society.

Zone 4: People and Places of the Middle Ages

Located at the heart of the exhibition, this zone, developed by the Museum of History, is designed to evoke the courtyard of a medieval palace. Arches frame natural phenomena such as clouds and rain, and the sole object is an interactive table at which visitors can learn more about legendary figures including Tristan and Iseult, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, Beowulf and Grendel, and Robin Hood.

Zone 5: Heavenly Treasures

The decline of the Western Roman Empire weakened the influence of the Church, and pagan beliefs brought by invading peoples were widespread during the early medieval period. The strong organization of the Church and the support of wealthy monarchs helped the Church regain its dominance and, by A.D. 1000, most of Europe was Christian. This zone examines the resurgence of Christianity and the power of the Church during the Middle Ages.

Zone 6: Courtly Life

A medieval court was the heart of a kingdom's administration. Rulers surrounded themselves with nobles who enjoyed lives of luxury, as long as they remained in favour. Art flourished, leisure and pleasure abounded, and diplomatic ties were forged. It could all disappear in an instant, however, in a maze of shifting alliances and enmities. This zone explores life at court through leisure activities and entertainment, courtly romance and medieval fashion.

Zone 7: Urban Life

As warrior-kings built strongholds for themselves — first in wood and later in stone — small communities sprang up around their walls. In time, these became villages, then market towns and trade centres, many of which were densely packed and often relatively poor. Fire was a constant concern, as was disease — including the Black Death of 1348, which by some estimates killed 60 per cent of Europe's population. Despite these worries, medieval men, women and children ate, drank and were merry. This zone looks at the growth of urban centres and their effect on trade and daily life.

Zone 8: The Medieval Legacy

In this zone, the Museum of History has developed new content to explore the effect of the Middle Ages on North America today. From the establishment of universities and

common law to Gothic Revival architecture and religious pilgrimages, the influence of medieval Europe remains with us to this day.