

House, Church, Castle



Fascinating Facts

- The model on which the Dome of the Rock was based is called the Dome of the Chain. It still stands in the shadow of the full-sized mosque.
- The Chinese in the medieval world believed that the emperor's palace marked the center of both the country and the entire universe.
- European castle designs grew more elaborate and complex as the weapons of potential attackers became more sophisticated.

Genre	Comprehension Skill	Text Features
Nonfiction	Sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Captions • Sidebar

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by Tammy Zambo





In the medieval world, people from different places traded with one another, sharing both goods and ideas. Some of these ideas included new ways to build familiar structures. Still, buildings in different cultures were unique. In this book you will learn about fascinating buildings in medieval Asia, Africa, and Europe. You will also learn how these buildings affected the way people lived.



Vocabulary

mosque

caliph

monk

pilgrimage

monarch

knight

cathedral



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Trading Ideas

In the Middle Ages, people from different parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe traded goods. They also traded ideas and religious practices. Islam, for example, spread widely through Arabia. With the growing number of Muslims came a growing number of newly constructed **mosques**.

The Dome of the Rock

One new mosque built during this time was the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, Israel. Even today, it is a sacred place of worship to Muslims all over the world. They believe that Muhammad ascended to heaven from the rock on which the mosque is built. The same rock is also considered holy to Jews and Christians because important Jewish temples once stood on it.



The Dome of the Rock was built between about 687 and 691, and it has changed very little since then.



Inside the dome, decorations include calligraphy and mosaics made with gold.



Building the Mosque

The Dome of the Rock was built by Abd al-Malik, a Muslim **caliph**, or successor to Muhammad. He wanted large numbers of Muslims to come to Jerusalem to worship. Abd al-Malik wanted to build a mosque that was perfect in every way. To be sure each detail was right, he had another mosque built first as a model. Only then did building begin on the Dome of the Rock.

The Romans had already used arches to build domes. Mosques were not usually built with domes, so the architects of the Dome of the Rock borrowed the Romans' method. They first built a base with eight sides. To make the base strong enough to hold up the dome, they used arches in the base. Then they built the dome on top of the base.



A Perfect Balance

Inside the Dome of the Rock, the space is divided by three rings of columns and piers, or supporting structures, made from marble. The innermost ring surrounds the sacred rock. The other two rings provide walkways along the sides of the outer wall. There are eight sides in total, and four of them have entrances. These entrances face north, south, east, and west. Detailed decorations were added on nearly every surface.

The builders paid just as much attention to the outside of the mosque as they did to the inside. They built the walls with marble and decorated them with colorful mosaics. The dome itself was covered in gold at first. Today's dome is made of aluminum covered with gold so that it will last longer.

The early Muslims were highly skilled in the arts of mosaics and calligraphy. They used tiles in vivid, brilliant colors to create mosaics. The designs were often shapes and patterns, rather than illustrations.



Calligraphy is the art of fine handwriting. At the Dome of the Rock, decorative calligraphy is used both inside and outside. Inside, the writing tells the story of Muhammad. Outside, verses from the Quran appear in calligraphy.

The Hall of Supreme Harmony

Another great medieval building is the Hall of Supreme Harmony, one part of the Forbidden City in Beijing, China. It is the most important among all the buildings of the Forbidden City, which was the emperor's royal palace. The Hall of Supreme Harmony is also one of the largest medieval Chinese buildings still standing today. It was completed in 1420. This structure was important because official public ceremonies were held there. One of the ceremonies marked the emperor's taking his position on the throne. Other ceremonies included his announcements of war and peace.



This courtyard in front of the Hall of Supreme Harmony is so large that twenty thousand people could gather there at once to see the emperor.





A Place of Honor

Many characteristics of the outside of the hall were important symbols to the Chinese. For example, the building itself faces south to show honor and respect. The roof tiles are yellow, a roof color only the emperor could use. Two carved dragons sit on each end of the roof's main edge. Each dragon stands for the emperor and is 11 feet (3.3 meters) high and weighs 4.3 tons. The dragons were meant to guard the hall from fire. They were also believed to have the ability to gather clouds to make rain.

The dragons did not prove to be enough protection, however. The Hall of Supreme Harmony burned down less than a year after it was finished. It was rebuilt three times, and each time it burned down again. The present hall was built in 1695.

Inside the Hall of Supreme Harmony there is a lot of space. In the center the emperor's golden throne sits on a platform that has been raised up. Twenty-four giant pillars support the roof above the throne. Each one is 41.5 feet (12.5 meters) high and 3.5 feet (1.1 meters) in diameter. The six pillars closest to the throne are covered in gold. The rest are painted red. The throne, like the hall, faces south.

Dragons appear everywhere in the interior decorations. The throne is covered with carvings of them. They fill every inch of the six golden columns and are painted on the walls. Even a design on the ceiling includes two dragons playing with pearls. The Chinese believed that pearls protected the emperor's power.



The emperor's throne is the centerpiece of the Hall of Supreme Harmony.





The Rock Churches of Lalibela

It is said that King Lalibela, of the Zagwe people, once had a vision of the city of Jerusalem in heaven. He saw churches that were carved from a single stone. He wanted to build the churches he saw in his vision. From about 1185 to 1225, Lalibela had eleven churches carved from the solid volcanic rock that covered the area. As a result the area where the churches stand was named Lalibela, after the king.



The Church of the Savior of the World, in Lalibela, Ethiopia, is supported by a total of sixty-two columns.



Some of the stone churches stand below ground level. To create one of these churches, workers first dug a deep trench around a large rock slab. They then carved away bits of the slab to shape doors, windows, arches, and staircases. They left the base of the building attached to the ground. These churches are called monoliths, or structures made from a single block of stone. Other churches are carved directly into the side of the rock. Each church is three to four stories tall. A maze of underground tunnels connects the churches.



The Timkat Celebration

Christianity is the oldest surviving religion in Ethiopia. All of the stone churches at Lalibela are still used today as places of worship. **Monks** perform daily activities in the churches. Some of them live nearby in caves that are also carved out of rock.

Each year, thousands of believers make **pilgrimages** to the churches at Lalibela. Timkat, a holiday that celebrates the baptism of Jesus, is a popular time for making these pilgrimages.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the most sacred object is the tabot (TA-but). This is a tablet made of wood or stone represents the Ten Commandments. Each church has a tabot stored in a special place that only priests can enter. During Timkat, priests take all the tabots of the churches to a nearby river. There, the priests lead the pilgrims in a worship service.



Many Churches, Many Styles

A variety of designs were used in building the Lalibela rock churches. None of the churches are alike. The largest church is the Church of the Savior of the World, also called the Church of the Redeemer. A colonnade, or row of columns, is outside the church. Arches are carved both on the roof and above the colonnade.

The entire building of the Church of St. George is carved in the shape of a cross. Two crosses are also carved on the roof, one inside the other. The roof is flat and lies at the original ground level. The carved crosses also push off rainwater from the roof. The water pours out through the mouths of carved figures called gargoyles on the sides of the church.

Each church is different from the others on the inside too. Most of them are simple and plain. The Church of Mary, however, is decorated with carvings and murals. There are also pictures of the sun, animals, and flowers. This church also has a tall column called the Pillar of Light. It is draped in fabric. It is said that at one time the fabric was removed and the pillar filled the church with light.

The interior of the Church of Mary is decorated with carvings and murals.



Workers prospered in medieval European cities during the 1300s. This picture shows a typical worker's house that could be found in central Europe.



A Central European House

As trade expanded in the Middle Ages, cities in Europe grew. Living space was limited in the cities, so houses were usually built upward. In Central Europe the ground floor of a house often had a merchant's shop or a craftsman's workshop. The middle floors were used for living space. The top floor was often a storage area. The roof usually sloped steeply to prevent heavy snow from building up.



European Castles

Castles, an important type of medieval building, still stand all over Europe. A castle was the home of the lord of a manor or, sometimes, a **monarch**. A castle was much more than just a home. Castles were also fortresses designed for protection. They took up enough land to provide areas for storing weapons and supplies, as well as housing for the lord's main followers, including **knights**. People who lived in a castle also needed to eat, so besides a kitchen there were stables and pens for keeping pigs, chickens, and other animals. There was even a vegetable garden. The people also needed a reliable water supply. Every part of a castle was designed to protect the lord and his followers from an extended attack, also called a siege.

The castle's main features are the gatehouse, the moat, the towers, and the keep. The gate was the entry to the castle. It was also the castle's weakest point. A drawbridge could be lowered to cross the moat or raised to cover the gate. Gate doors had heavy grates that could be raised and lowered inside the gateway. The moat was a canal filled with water that surrounded all or part of a castle. Towers strengthened the castle wall and provided storage and living quarters. From a tower, defenders could fire arrows and other missiles at the enemy. The keep included lodging for the lord and a great hall where most of the business and social life of the castle took place. The keep could be a separate building in the center of the castle grounds or a tower in the inner wall.



This is an aerial view of Beaumaris Castle in Wales.





A Space of Symbols

Some of the greatest buildings built in the Middle Ages in Europe were the **cathedrals**. They were designed so that Christians would picture heaven when they worshipped there. A cathedral could take hundreds of years to build.

Nearly every part of a cathedral had a special meaning. The end of the cathedral where the altar was located faced east toward the rising sun. Another common feature was the cross-shaped design of the building. The walls of a cathedral were built very high. This was done to give worshippers the impression that the whole building was reaching toward heaven. Windows were used everywhere to let in as much light as possible, because light symbolized God's presence.

Many of the windows in a cathedral were made of stained glass. They let in light and inspired worshippers with their beauty. They did even more than this, however. Very few people during the Middle Ages could read. They could not understand Latin, which was spoken at the services. Most people learned about their religion from the stained-glass windows. The windows showed Bible stories and important biblical figures. Statues both inside and outside the cathedral also taught people about their religion. For these reasons cathedrals were sometimes called "the Bible of the poor."

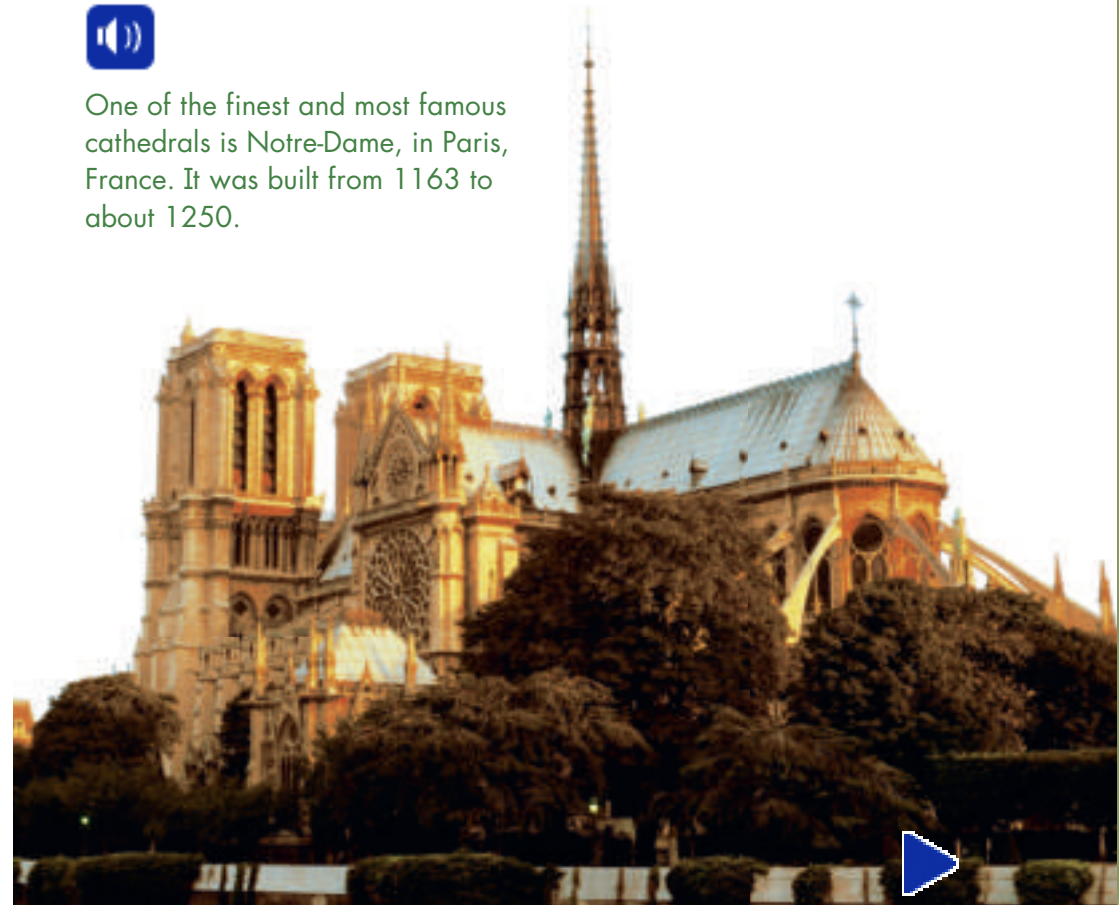


Houses, Churches, and Castles

In the medieval world, many buildings were designed using ideas from different places. The Dome of the Rock, for example, borrowed the use of domes and arches from the Romans. This mosque was carefully planned and decorated with many details. The result was a place of worship for large numbers of Muslims. The rock churches of Lalibela are also impressive places of worship and pilgrimages are still made to them. The Hall of Supreme Harmony in China reflects how important the emperor was to his people. In medieval Europe, houses in the cities had several floors. Castles had features for protection. Cathedrals had stained-glass windows that told Bible stories. Structures all over the medieval world shared common ideas in their designs, yet each reflected its own culture.



One of the finest and most famous cathedrals is Notre-Dame, in Paris, France. It was built from 1163 to about 1250.



Glossary

caliph a successor to Muhammad

cathedral a large, important Christian church

knight a warrior trained and prepared to fight on horseback

monarch a king or queen who is the supreme ruler

monk a man who devotes his life to religion

mosque a Muslim place of worship

pilgrimage a journey to a place of religious importance

Write to It!

In the medieval world, people built new structures for a variety of purposes. Choose the building described in this book that interests you the most. Write two or three paragraphs explaining what features you find interesting and explain why.

Write your paragraphs on a separate sheet of paper.

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