

Medieval Crime, Punishment, and Law

Before the 1200s, medieval people used _____ or tests to find out if somebody was _____ or innocent.

- **Ordeal by Fire:**

- **Ordeal by Water:**

- **Ordeal by Combat (Battle):**

What was the reasoning behind trial by ordeal?

The three things Henry II did that changed law and order in England:

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Medieval Courts

What were the **three** types of courts, and how were they different?

Refer to your textbook and match the legal matter with the court it is associated with. Write **M** for Manor Court, **R** for Royal Court, and **C** for Church Court.

1. _____ Common law was used
2. _____ Farming issues
3. _____ Villagers decide who wins the case
4. _____ Could *not* give the death sentence
5. _____ A more lenient court
6. _____ Poaching game from Royal forests
7. _____ Too much manure used on fields
8. _____ Murder, treason, rape, burglary
9. _____ Public drunkenness
10. _____ Literacy test given to prove a person worked for the church
11. _____ Representative of the lord acted as judge
12. _____ Tried bishops, deacons, priests, clerks, monks, nuns
13. _____ Treason
14. _____ Property disputes
15. _____ Cutting wood from Royal forests

Reflection Question:

Answer the following question in a paragraph (at least 5 full sentences). Consider both sides of the argument, and remember that your answer does not have to be “yes” or “no.”

Do you think that it is right to have a death penalty for criminals today?

MEDIEVAL PUNISHMENTS

If you were found guilty of a crime you would expect to face a severe punishment.

- Thieves had their hands cut off.
- Women who committed murder were strangled and then burnt.
- People who illegally hunted in royal parks had their ears cut off.
- High treason was punishable by being hung, drawn and quartered

There were very few prisons as they cost money and local communities were not prepared to pay for their upkeep. It was cheaper to execute someone for bad crimes or mutilate them and then let them go. Most towns had a gibbet just outside of it. People were hung on these and their bodies left to rot over the weeks as a warning to others. However, such violent punishments clearly did not put off people. In 1202, the city of Lincoln had 114 murders, 89 violent robberies and 65 people were wounded in fights. Only 2 people were executed for these crimes and it can be concluded that many in Lincoln got away with their crime.

Many crimes such as murder were punished by death. Ordinary people were hanged. Rich people were beheaded.



a. Burning

If a person said bad things about God they were called a heretic and were burned at the stake. This was a very slow and painful death, but the idea was that the guilty person would then be allowed into heaven by God rather than sent to hell – because they had already burned enough!

b. Mutilation

Cutting off parts of the body was common. A person who stole a purse

might have their hand cut off; a person who had spread vicious rumours could have their tongues cut out!



c. Hung, drawn and quartered

A person guilty of treason (planning to kill or overthrow the King) would get the nastiest punishment of all. They would firstly be hanged until they were blue in the face. They would then be cut down, and sliced open from the neck to the belly. Still alive, their guts would be pulled out and thrown into a cauldron of boiling water. Finally, they would be chopped into four pieces, from the legs upwards.

d. The Stocks

Lesser criminals would be locked into the stocks and have rotten food thrown at them. Bakers who put sawdust in their bread or brewers who watered down their beer were often punished like this.

Crime	Punishment	Why punishment was used	Fair or Unfair	Explain
High treason (crimes against king or country)				
Murder, manslaughter, stealing anything worth a lot of money (men)				
Murder, manslaughter, stealing anything worth a lot of money (women)				
Fighting, drunkenness or small thefts				