



# SCHOOL HISTORY

## Medieval Monasteries



### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- The architecture of monasteries built in the Middle Ages
- Important structures within monasteries
- Monastic activities of monks and nuns
- Various social functions of a monastery in the Middle Ages



### FACT FILE

[Let's find out more about Medieval Monasteries!](#)



Image of the Fountains Abbey monastery built in the 12th century



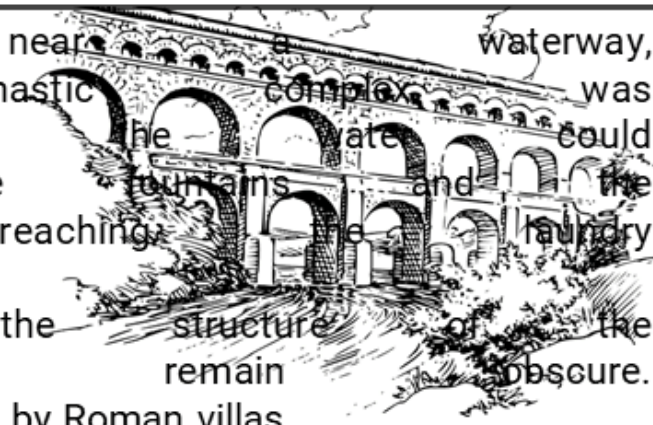
The word 'monastery' derives from the Latin *monastĕrium*.

A monastery is a complex of buildings where a religious community of monks or nuns lives. Such buildings originated in the Middle Ages. Monasteries exist in the Christian and Buddhist religions. If the monastery is led by an abbot, it is also referred to as an abbey, or a priory if it is of lesser importance. Often the priory is dependent on an abbey or a monastery. The monasteries of the military orders of the Middle Ages were called commanderies.

Since the Middle Ages, a **monastery** is a building where a community of monks or nuns live under the authority of an abbot or an abbess. Monasteries do not constitute a religious order: each of them can be a separate community.



- Usually built near a waterway, the whole monastic complex was oriented so that the water could be sent to the fountains and the kitchen, before reaching the laundry and the baths.
- The origins of the structure of the typical monastery remain obscure. Most likely, monks were inspired by Roman villas.



A Roman villa was a country house for rich people built in the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire.

- Moreover, whenever they could, monks established their communities in pre-existing buildings. Often these buildings were ancient villas of Roman origin that were adapted.
- Sometimes they also occupied buildings previously dedicated to pagan cults.



Image of the Bassac Abbey in France

Over time, monasteries began to resemble each other as they started to be built following certain criteria. The end result was that a monastery resembled a small city. This was especially evident in big monasteries where houses were divided by streets and buildings.



The church was the nucleus of the city and represented the religious centre of the community.

Pursuing independence from the outside world, monks also equipped themselves with mills, ovens, stables, wineries and the craftsmen's workshops where repairs and other needs of the community were met.





## THINK ABOUT THIS!

ACTIVITIES FOR AGES 14-16



- 1 SOURCE ANALYSIS.** Critically read the source and answer the questions that follow. Substantiate your work with facts. (X marks)

### NARRATIVE

Monks and nuns were key elements of the English church. Living in monasteries and nunneries, they had made the decision to withdraw from the world and devote their lives to God. Monasteries were an important part of the Christian faith because monks and nuns would pray for the soul of a dead person, which was believed to be important in order for a person to get to heaven.

William I encouraged the building of monasteries in England, building Battle Abbey, a monastery on the site of Harold Godwinson's death at the Battle of Hastings. It is thought this was to show penance for the deaths at Hastings.

In the years following 1066, the number of monks and nuns increased dramatically, from around 1,000 to more than 4,000. There were around 60 monasteries in England at the start of William's reign, and more than 250 by the time of his death in 1087.

### SOURCE A

### GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Who are considered key elements of the English church?
2. What is the purpose of monasteries to the lives of monks and nuns?
3. Who encouraged the building of medieval monasteries in England?
4. What followed the increase of monasteries throughout England?
5. Do you think the spread of monasteries throughout England was a good thing? Explain your answer.



- 1) The monks and nuns were key elements
- 2) They would pray for the soul of a dead person.
- 3) William I encouraged the building
- 4) The number of monks and nuns increased dramatically
- 5) Yes, because the monasteries help the catholic faith grow