

Siege Warfare in the Middle Ages



Adapted from <http://www.medievalwarfare.info/>

Master medieval vocabulary. Fill the blanks below with these words:

portcullises • battering • undermine • garrison • belfries • murder-holes
besieging • fortified • towers • siege • mangonel • moats

In the medieval period, _____ armies used a wide variety of siege engines including: scaling ladders, _____ rams, siege _____ and various types of catapults such as the _____, ballista, and trebuchet. Siege techniques also included mining.

Medieval fortifications became progressively stronger and more dangerous to attackers as illustrated by the increasing use of _____, through which people could be shot as they entered a castle. Arrow slits, concealed doors and deep water wells were also important to resisting a siege.

Designers of castles paid particular attention to defending entrances, protecting gates with drawbridges, _____ and barbicans. Wet skins of freshly slaughtered animals were draped over gates and other wooden structures to retard fire. _____ and other water defences were also vital to defenders.

Virtually all large cities had city walls. Great effort was expended to ensure a good water supply inside the city in case of _____. In some cases, long tunnels were constructed to carry water into the city. Complex systems of underground tunnels were used for storage and communications in some medieval cities.

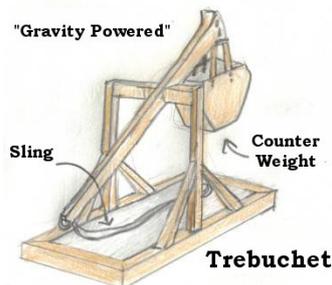
Attackers would try to get over the walls using scaling ladders and siege towers called _____. Alternatively, they could try to get through the doors using a battering ram, or through the walls using heavy artillery. They might try tunnelling under the walls to gain access, but more often they would try to _____ the walls to bring them down.

In a siege one army typically attacked an enemy within a stronghold, either a castle or a _____ town. Castles were often located within fortified towns - in fact many towns grew up around existing castles - so that the castle became a sort of citadel within the town.

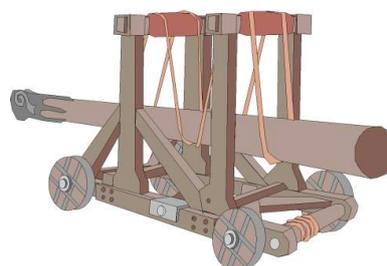
Besiegers had a number of techniques for gaining control of their objective - either by forcing a way in, or by forcing the besieged _____ out.



A belfry or siege tower



Trebuchet



Battering ram



Portcullis

2 Master medieval vocabulary. Fill the blanks below with these words:

biological • bribery • defender • gunpowder • hostages •
mines • psychological • scaling • siege • trebuchets

Specific attacking techniques included:

❖ **breaching the walls or doorways.**

Stone-throwing machines such as _____ and mangonels were used, as well as machines to knock holes in walls, such as battering rams.

❖ **tunnelling under the walls by digging _____.**

❖ **getting over the walls.**

Attackers would use _____ ladders and siege engines such as large mobile wooden towers known as belfries.

❖ **sitting and waiting.**

If communications between the besieged and the outside world could be cut, then the defenders could be denied food supplies and sometimes water. The word _____ means "to sit", an indication that this was a standard technique.

❖ **inducing someone on the inside to assist the attackers, either through _____ or by exploiting divided loyalties.**

This person could for example open a postern gate at night. Occasionally attackers could be smuggled into the besieged fortification to fulfil this role, as for example in ancient times in the case of the famous Trojan horse.

❖ **threats, terror and _____ techniques.**

To help weaken the will of the defenders, attackers could make threats or promises, or terrorise the defenders - for example by mutilating or executing _____, or by using throwing machines to lob fire or body parts into the fortification.

❖ **_____ warfare.**

Medieval besiegers were known to project diseased animals into fortifications with the deliberate intention of spreading disease and so weakening the garrison. In some cases it was possible to poison water supplies, though most fortifications had their own wells or water cisterns.

Until the invention of gunpowder-based weapons (and the resulting higher-velocity projectiles), the balance of power and logistics definitely favoured the _____.

With the invention of _____, the traditional methods of defence became less and less effective against a determined siege.

3 Draw up a simple table like this one in your workbook and then categorise the above methods under each heading:

Physical	Psychological	Physical and Psychological