

MEDIEVAL JOBS: MONK

The Roman Catholic Church played a major role in the lives of medieval Europeans, from the lowliest serf to the king. The clergy, or those who had devoted their lives to the serving the church, were highly respected and very important. Monks were one type of clergyman who filled this role. Medieval monks lived in monasteries, where they studied and prayed together. Their lives were similar in some ways to that of a rural peasant. Monks farmed the fields, tended to animals, and produced food and drink, such as cheese, bread, beer, and wine.

Monks ate two spare meals a day, nothing luxurious. Their main diet consisted of eggs, fish or fowl, bread, vegetables, and a little fruit. Red meat was not allowed. Their clothing consisted of long loose robes of coarse material, with hoods to cover their heads.

Because monks prayed and worked together, their daily schedule was more disciplined than that of the village peasant. Benedictine monks followed what was called the Benedictine rule, established by Saint Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–543). In a twenty-four-hour day, the rule instructed monks to engage in eight hours of work, eight hours of sleep, and eight hours of devotion, reading, meditation, and meals.

Life in the monastery According to the Benedictine rule, monks were required to seek an education to benefit their Christian studies. Each day began with collective prayer and study at dawn. Before midday, monks prayed, attended a general meeting worked for two hours. The strict schedule continued into the afternoon with lunch, study, work, and prayer until dinner. One evening hour was reserved for further prayer before bedtime. The schedule for nuns was similar to that of monks in the same order. Their days were dedicated to prayer, study, and sustenance.

Adapted from:

Carnegie, Julie L. "Medieval Europe: 814–1350: Social Class System and the Economy." *UXL World Eras*, vol. 8: Medieval Europe: 814–1350, UXL, 2016, pp. 45-66. *Gale In Context: Middle School*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3629700115/MSIC?u=mcps&sid=bookmark-MSIC&xid=688cf364. Accessed 9 Nov. 2021.