



Medieval Kings and Queens: Their Powers and Limits

KS2 HISTORY

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Ages 11-14



3 min read

What Powers Did Medieval Kings and Queens Have?

A medieval **king or queen** was incredibly powerful. They made the laws, controlled the army, and owned most of the land in the kingdom. When a **monarch** spoke, people had to listen—or face serious punishment. But here's the surprising part: even the most powerful ruler couldn't do absolutely everything they wanted.

Making Laws and Going to War

Medieval monarchs had the right to create new **laws** and decide how justice was carried out. They could declare **war** and call upon **knights** and soldiers to fight for them. Kings and queens also collected **taxes** from their people, which gave them money to pay for armies, castles, and royal courts.

Think of it like being a teacher with total control over the classroom rules—you decide what's allowed, who gets in trouble, and what happens next.

Owning the Kingdom

Land was the greatest source of power in medieval times. The monarch technically owned all the land in the kingdom. They gave pieces of it to **nobles** (like **dukes** and **earls**) in exchange for loyalty and military support. These nobles then gave smaller chunks to **knights**, creating a system called **feudalism**.

The Limits of Royal Power

Here's what makes medieval rule interesting: kings and queens couldn't ignore the **Church**. The **Pope** and bishops had enormous influence, and a monarch who upset them could face serious problems. Additionally, **nobles** had their own armies and lands. If a king pushed them too far, they might rebel.

In **1215**, English nobles forced **King John** to sign the **Magna Carta**—a document stating that even the king had to obey the law. This was revolutionary!

Think of it like your parents having authority at home, but they still have to follow the law and can't ignore what teachers or the headteacher say.

Daily Power in Practice

Medieval monarchs appointed **advisors** and **nobles** to help run the kingdom. They held grand feasts, made alliances through marriage, and displayed their wealth through magnificent **castles** and ceremonies. A strong king could hold power for decades; a weak one might lose everything to rebellion or invasion.

Medieval royal power was real and feared, but it was never absolute—it always depended on keeping enough people happy enough to stay loyal.