



PODCAST

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CYPRUS

Medieval Games Played by Children in Castles



Children in castles did not have video games, televisions, or plastic toys. But they were not bored. They used imagination, simple objects and open spaces to create fun games.



Pretend Knight Games

Children often watched knights training in castle courtyards. Knights practiced fighting with swords, riding horses, and using bows and arrows.

So what did children do? They copied them! Sticks became swords. Wooden boards became shields. Blankets became royal capes.

Friends became dragons or enemy knights.

They pretended to defend towers, rescue princesses, or protect the castle gates.

Board Games Inside the Castle

When it was too cold or rainy to play outside, children played indoors.

One famous game was **Chess**. Adults loved chess because it was a game of strategy and thinking. Some older children learned to play too.

And... did you know that chess came from India? This game was invented there and then it was played in Persia, and from there it arrived to Europe.

Another popular game was **Nine Men's Morris**. This game was sometimes carved into wooden tables or even into stone window seats in castles! Players tried to line up three pieces in a row.

Children also played simple games using:

- ❖ Pebbles
- ❖ Carved wooden pieces

- ❖ Dice made from bone
- ❖ Stones arranged in patterns



Skill and Strength Games

Some games helped children grow strong.

Wrestling (friendly and careful!)

Running races across the courtyard

Jumping contests

Balancing games

Boys who grew up in castles were often expected to become knights. But girls also played running and chasing games and joined in imaginative adventures.

Outdoor Games Across Medieval Europe

Most children in medieval Europe did not live in castles. They lived in villages and towns. They worked hard helping their families, but they still found time to play.

Running and Chasing Games

Children played games similar to:

Tag

Hide-and-seek

Follow-the-leader

Relay races

These games needed no equipment — just energy!



Early Ball Games

Balls were made from: leather stuffed with straw; cloth tied tightly; wool wrapped in string. Children kicked, threw, or carried the ball. In medieval England, a rough game called “mob football” was played in villages. It had very few rules and lots of running!

Pebble and Tossing Games

Children drew circles in dirt and tossed stones inside them. They stacked rocks and tried to knock them over with careful aim.

Some games were very similar to the game of “jacks” played today, tossing small stones in the air and catching them.

Storytelling and Riddles

Not all games were physical.

In castle halls or village homes, families gathered near the fire. Children listened to stories about: brave knights, magical creatures and clever heroes.

They also enjoyed riddles like: “I have cities but no houses, rivers but no water. What am I?”

(Answer: A map!)

Medieval Children's Games in Cyprus

As we know, Cyprus, during medieval times, had powerful castles such as: Kolossi Castle, Limassol Castle, Othello Castle.

Different rulers controlled the island, including the Lusignan dynasty and the Venetian Republic. These castles protected towns and harbors.

Playing Near the Castle Walls

Children living near Cypriot castles probably saw: soldiers guarding towers, messengers running with news, archers practicing, markets and festivals.

They likely copied what they saw. So, they might have: pretended to guard the castle gates, used sticks as swords, acted out rescue missions, practiced aiming stones at safe targets.

Village Games in Cyprus

Most children in medieval Cyprus lived in villages. They helped with farming, caring for animals, and household work. But they still played!

They could play: pebble tossing games, running races between olive trees, hide-and-seek behind stone walls, hoop rolling with wooden rings.

Because Cyprus has warm weather, children often played outside most of the year.

Festivals and Celebrations

During religious feasts or harvest celebrations, children gathered in large groups. They may have: danced in circles; played chasing games, competed in friendly contests, listened to music and stories.

Music and celebration were important parts of life on the island.

What All Medieval Children Had in Common

Whether in a castle in France, a village in Germany, or near the sunny towers of Cyprus, medieval children shared many things. They used: imagination, nature, simple objects, friendship.

Through play they learned: courage, cooperation, balance, strategy and creativity

Even without modern toys... medieval children enjoyed their play!

A Historically Documented Medieval Game: Knucklebones

Knucklebones was widely played in medieval Europe and dates back to ancient times. Archaeologists have found knucklebones, usually sheep ankle bones, at sites across medieval places across Europe.

The game was played by children, and sometimes adults, using the small ankle bones of sheep called “astragali”.

How Knucklebones Was Played (Historical Form)

Equipment:

4–5 sheep knucklebones (or small stones)

A flat surface (ground, wooden floor, table)

Basic Version (Common Medieval Style)

Scatter the knucklebones on the ground.

Toss one bone into the air.

While it is airborne, quickly pick up one bone from the ground.

Catch the tossed bone before it falls.

Repeat, picking up bones one at a time.

Then repeat in rounds, picking up two at once, then three, and so on.

If a player:

Drops a bone

Fails to catch the tossed bone

Moves the others accidentally

Their turn ends.

The player who completes the most rounds wins.



And now... let's see what children in China were doing at the same time, in medieval time. Children's play in China was rich and varied and some games were surprisingly similar to European ones, while others were uniquely Chinese.

1. Top-Spinning

A favorite among both boys and girls.

Children would spin wooden tops, often decorated with bright colors.

Competitions involved who could spin their top the longest or knock over another top.

Evidence: Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasty texts describe this pastime.

2. Chinese Yo-Yo

A wooden or bamboo spool on a string between two sticks.

Players toss, catch, and perform tricks with it.

Likely played by older children, sometimes as part of festivals or local fairs.

3. Games with Stones or Beans

Similar to European knucklebones, Chinese children played “Jacks” with beans or small stones.

Sometimes called “Five-Grain Game”

Often included counting games or fortune-telling elements.

4. Tag, Chase, and Martial Play

Children mimicked archery, swordplay, and cavalry maneuvers.

Toy swords, staves, or sticks were common.

Games were often inspired by military and court life, much like European mock battles.

5. Shadow and Riddle Games

Children played shadow-tag or simple puzzle/riddle games.

Riddles were popular at festivals; even children learned to compose and solve them.

6. Kite Flying

By the Tang dynasty, kites were used for play, not just signaling or military purposes.

Children flew small kites in open fields and sometimes attached small bells or messages.

7. Board Games

These were mostly for older children or apprentices learning strategy and patience.

Some children's boards had simplified versions for play.

Overall, they playing was very similar in spirit to European children: they imitated adult roles, played dexterity games, and enjoyed simple toys made from everyday objects.



Panel with boys playing