

Episode



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ITALY



MATERIALS AND MEANS OF TRANSPORT FOR BUILDING CASTLES

MIA: Hello everyone! Welcome back to PodCastle, a fantastic journey into the history of castles—fascinating architectural structures full of stories and legends.

AMY: Do you remember what we talked about last year?

ALICE: In previous episodes, we talked about the history of castles in our countries of origin, the phenomenon of castle-building in Europe, how their internal structure was organized, and we imagined what a dream castle could be like.

ANDREA: And today? What are we talking about?

FRA F: Today we will talk about the materials and means of transport used to build castles.

DANIELE: Awesome!!! So interesting!!!

SOFIA: Yes, it is a fascinating topic!

At first, wood was used because it was easy to find, light to transport, and simple to work with.



The most common trees used were beech, pine, and oak.

However, wood is not very strong and is flammable, so people stopped using it and started using stone, which is more resistant to weapons that worked by igniting gunpowder—a mixture of sulphur, charcoal, and saltpetre.

TANCREDI: Yeah, definitely! But stone is heavy and not easy to work with or obtain...

STELLA: You are right. Stone blocks were taken from quarries. In Italy, there were clay quarries—a whitish material that, after being fired, turns red and becomes solid bricks. To extract materials, a person had to enter a wooden wheel and run inside it to activate a pulley system that could lift very heavy objects.

ELIA: Stones and bricks were transported with carts pulled by mules and donkeys, which unfortunately could not handle very steep slopes. If the castle was near a river, transport was done by barges and boats—much easier for the poor animals!

STEFAN: Once extracted and transported, the stone blocks had to be shaped with hammers and chisels and joined together with mortar and lime.

AMAL: What are those?

FRA B.: Lime is made from limestone ground into powder and then mixed with eggshells and water. Mortar was the glue that held the stones together, just like cement today.

AMAL: So, they just stacked stones and bricks on top of each other?!

AMIRA: In simple terms, yes—but construction was very complex. Building castles required a whole team of professionals: masons, blacksmiths, stonemasons, carpenters, and metalworkers. Masons built the walls, blacksmiths worked metal, stonemasons shaped the stones, and carpenters worked wood and transported materials.

AMY: Can you imagine what they invented to keep such huge structures standing while the mortar and lime dried?

ALICE: At construction sites, workers made holes in the walls where large wooden beams were inserted to support the structure—just like modern scaffolding. Once the building was finished, the beams were burned because they were no longer needed.

STEFAN: It took a lot of work and a huge number of materials!

MIA: Yes, especially to build the very tall towers with arrow slits to attack without being attacked. The main tower was the biggest and was called the “keep.” It was the symbol of the power of the family who owned the castle.

DANIELE: They were truly incredible defensive structures!

TANCREDI: Absolutely—and the castle also had to be beautiful, after all, the lord lived there...



ANDREA: Metals were also used to strengthen and decorate castles: lead, bronze, iron, and brass. Main doors often had iron reinforcements with large nails to prevent them from being broken down. Iron was also used to make gates, bars, nails, locks, armour, and weapons. Lead was used to seal windows and cover roofs. Bronze, made of copper and tin, was used for bells, handles, and decorative details.

Brass, made of zinc, copper, and tin, was used for gates, doors, windows, and drawbridges. Castles also had windows and glass panes. Glass was made from a special melted sand called silica.

ELIA: Castles are really fascinating, aren't they? Look at them carefully when you see one—every detail tells a story.

For now, our journey to discover the secrets of castles ends here, but we still have so much more to explore!

FRA B.: Thank you for listening. If you liked this episode, do not miss the next one—you will not regret it!