

# MEDIEVAL THEATRE

Grade 10 Part 1

Use slide in conjunction with Pages 174-176 in your blue text book.



# How is this lesson going to work?

- You are going to follow with in your BLUE textbook, pages 174 - 176.
- I am going to read with you through these notes.
- The notes provided in the presentation, you are going to copy into your book/file.



# Medieval Society

(Rewrite the following notes into your book/file)

- Originally Medieval Society could be divided into 3 groups:
  - The Clergy (The people who worked in the church)
  - The Nobility
  - The Peasants
  
- The ONE binding force was the Christian Faith.
  
- People were very afraid of not believing in, or disagreeing with, anything that they were taught by the church.



- Medieval society believed that the King was God's anointed leader. Therefore rebelling against the King was a sin.
- Their living conditions were appalling. In medieval times people had a totally different idea of what was sanitary and acceptable in terms of their living conditions. People washed only about twice a year (even if they were wealthy), and they did not have bathrooms, running water or cleaning agents as we know them today. There were open sewers, over-crowding and diseases in the towns.
- Medieval Europe existed under what we call the Feudal System. A feudal system means that there is an all-powerful noble lord who 'owns' peasants who work for him on his land.
- In the towns, however, trade served as a catalyst for urbanisation and development.
- Guilds (merchant and craft) were organised to represent the various different interests within society. For example, bakers and carpenters each had a guild.



- They formed guilds to perform a specific function, like look after sick members, bail people out of jail, and pray for lost souls.
  
- When the middle class prospered, society evolved and consisted of:
  - The clergy
  - The noblemen
  - The bourgeoisie (the middle class)
  - The peasants.



# Activity 2

2,1 Name the three main groups in Medieval Society.

2,2 Name the one binding force that had a great influence on medieval theatre.

2,3 Define 'clergy'.

2,4 Why was rebelling against the King a sin?

2,5 Describe the good as well as the bad works the monasteries carried out.

2,6 Describe the medieval living conditions.

2,7 Define "feudal system".

2,8 If you were a peasant, you had to become a labourer unless you became a member of the ...

2,9 Identify the two worlds that medieval folk thought were equally important.

2,10 Name the seven deadly sins.

2,11 Name the seven cardinal values.

2,12 Name the architectural styles for this period.



# MEDIEVAL THEATRE

Drama Grade 10, Part 2

Follow with pages 182 – 190 in your blue text book.



# The Roman Influence

## The Roman Empire: Colosseum

- The colosseum could accommodate 70 000 people.
- For the opening of the colosseum, they held the '100 day games'.
- These games included: Wild animal fights (900 animals were slaughtered during these 100 days), the re-enactment of the Naval/Sea battles, Execution of people (Christians) by beasts.
- For entertainment, Christians were fed to half-starved lions, burnt, and hacked to death.
- Neglect and weather caused the deterioration of the physical building.



## The Fall of the Roman Empire:

- With the fall of Rome, it became Christianized and ALL theatrical events were banned. Thus, secular theatre died.
- Most of Roman theatre was a spectacle rather than literary drama.
- Medieval Era was after the Roman Era

Images taken from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Colosseum> and <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/colosseum>.



Image taken from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Colosseum>



Image taken from <https://www.demilked.com/roman-structures-then-and-now/>

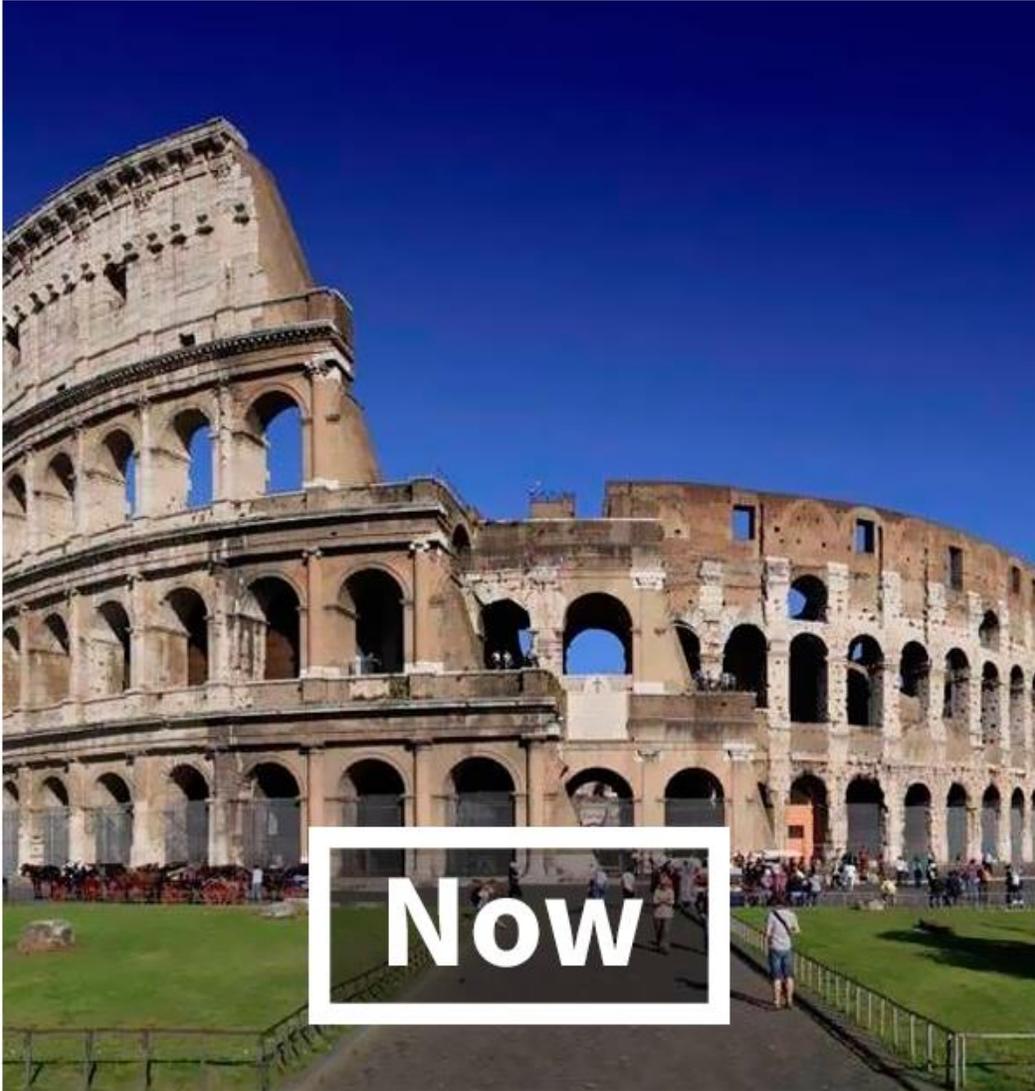


Image taken from <https://www.livescience.com/53615-horrors-of-the-colosseum.html>



# Middle Ages/Dark Ages/Medieval Era

## Glossary

- Liturgical Drama: Church drama based on biblical stories or teachings.
- Minstrel: A medieval singer or musician.

## The Decline of Classical Drama

- During the peak of the Roman Era, theatre was not as popular as the emphasis during this era was on building an empire.
- Christianity, it is said, also played a central role in decreasing the importance of theatre in Rome around 533 AD, because it did not approve of this art form.



# Wandering Performers

- Wandering performers moved around either on their own or in small groups.
- Unfortunately, the opposition of the church made it difficult for them to present their performances openly.
- Wandering performers travelled from town to town entertaining.
- They performed in taverns, and at court for the nobility (lords).
- Also referred to as 'minstrels'.

Image on the right taken from <https://www.yourdictionary.com/minstrel>



Image taken from <https://spartacus-educational.com/EXnormans14.htm>



# Liturgical Drama

- Definition: Drama acted within the church, based on biblical stories.
- With the decline of the classical drama came the age of the liturgical or church drama of Western Europe.
- Liturgical drama, contributed considerably to the restoration of the theatre to a respectful place in society.
- The church needed was to teach illiterate people, as majority of sermons/scriptures were in Latin (which not everyone understood).
- They performed short plays (called tropes) to visually present the teaching.
- The Roman Catholic church was thus responsible for the rebirth of theatre.



# Activity 2

2,1 Describe what entertainers who wandered across Europe were called.

2,2 Define 'liturgical drama'.



# MEDIEVAL THEATRE

Drama Grade 10, Part 2.2

Follow with pages 182 – 190 in your blue text book.



## Glossary: (p 185)

- **Mansions:** A series of scenic devices or acting stations.
- **Pageant Wagon:** A mobile stage.
- **Plateau:** Floor area adjacent to the mansions.
- **Secular:** The opposite of religious.
- **Vernacular:** The language spoken in a certain area/land.



# Drama Inside the Church (p. 186)

- It is thought that the aim of the church was to make its lessons more graphic, particularly since much of the populace were unable to read or understand Latin (the language of the church).
- Drama became a general means of religious instruction.
- The performers consisted of priests, nuns and choirboys.
- Medieval drama developed from the Christian liturgy and the organisation of the church year around the main events of the Bible.
- Easter and Christmas remained the focal point of most plays.



- The oldest surviving play to emerge from this era is the Quem Quaeritis trope (short play).
- As a rule, the production of drama was confined to cathedrals and monasteries as they had enough clergy (priests) to assume necessary roles.

Image below taken from <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/imagine-theres-no-clergy>



# Staging Conventions Within the Church

The performance space consisted of **TWO** parts

- Mansions:

The **mansions**, a.k.a. houses or booths, were a series of simple scenic devices or acting stations which suggested the **location** of incidents, e.g. heaven, Pilate's house, Jerusalem, hell's mouth, etc.

- The Plateau: (p. 187)

The mansions had **limited** performance space, therefore actors made use of the adjacent floor areas as well. This unlocalised playing space was known as the plateau.

(Adjacent means 'next to' or 'adjoining'.)

(Unlocalised means not being location specific)

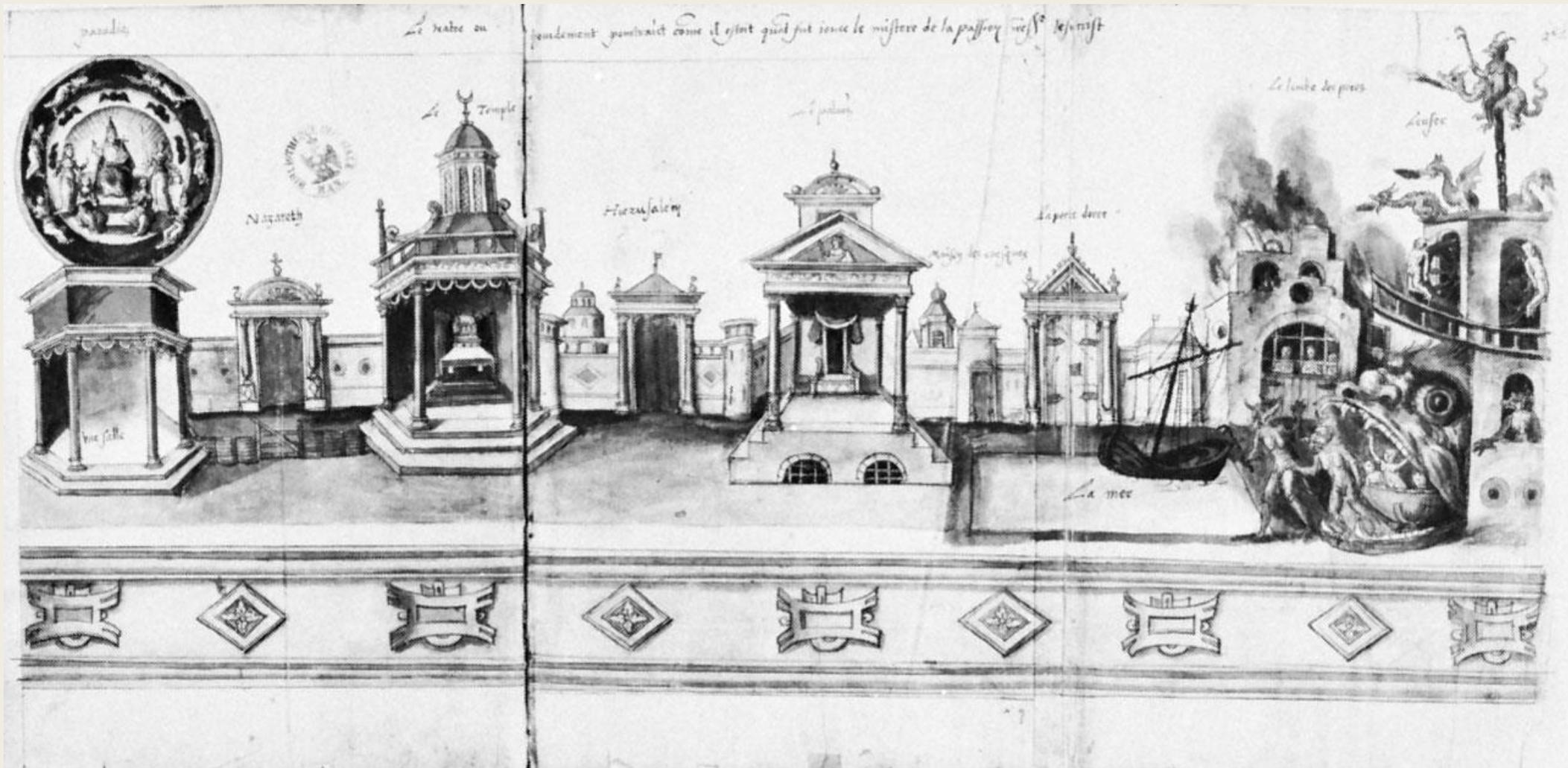


# The Layout of the Performance Space

- In effect, the performance space consisted of a series of **mansions** arranged around a neutral playing space (**plateau**).
- Performers moved from one station to another, as the play needed.
- Thus, the church provided a multiple setting in which all the scenes were completely visible to the audience at all times.
- The **general layout** of the performance space **included**:
  - The alter and crucifix as the centre point.
  - Heaven to the right (from the stage perspective – the Priest looking at the audience).
  - Hell (hell's mouth) to the left.



Image taken from <https://www.britannica.com/art/Western-theatre/Medieval-theatre>



## Activity 2: (p. 188)

2.1 Explain why theatre inside the church was so important.

2.2 State the two focal points of most plays.

2.3 Identify the oldest surviving play to come from the Medieval Period.

2.4 Define “trope”.

2.5 Define “plateau”.



# MEDIEVAL THEATRE

Drama Grade 10, Part 2.3

Follow with pages 182 – 190 in your blue text book.



# Drama Outside the Church

- In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, drama began to move outside of the church (literally and figuratively).
- Gradually church drama expanded and the plays evolved into elaborate productions that had to be moved outdoors to accommodate the large crowds (it became more popular).
- Once this happened, secular organisations started taking part in its production and at the end they had become the leading producers of plays.
- But, the church's approval had still remained essential, therefore the production of plays became a combined activity,
- The church provided approval and support, while the secular organisations provided money and the people needed.



- Medieval theatre gradually developed and changed:
- Traditionally plays were performed in Latin by men of the church, but this soon changed.
- All of a sudden plays were presented in the vernacular or native languages, instead of Latin, by non-clerical performers (this increased the number of actors available).



# Staging Conventions Outside the Church

The performance space consisted of **TWO** parts

- The Fixed Stage:

Definition: A long rectangular platform set against a permanent structure.

Heaven was placed on the right (stage-perspective) and hell on the left.

- The Mobile Stage (Pageant Wagon):

The setting up of mansions on pageant wagons (mobile stages that resemble carnival floats).

They pulled these pageant wagons from one place to another in a procession (order).

On the wagons, heaven and hell were symbolised vertically, as there wasn't enough space horizontally.



Image taken from <https://za.pinterest.com/pin/656399714415818935/>

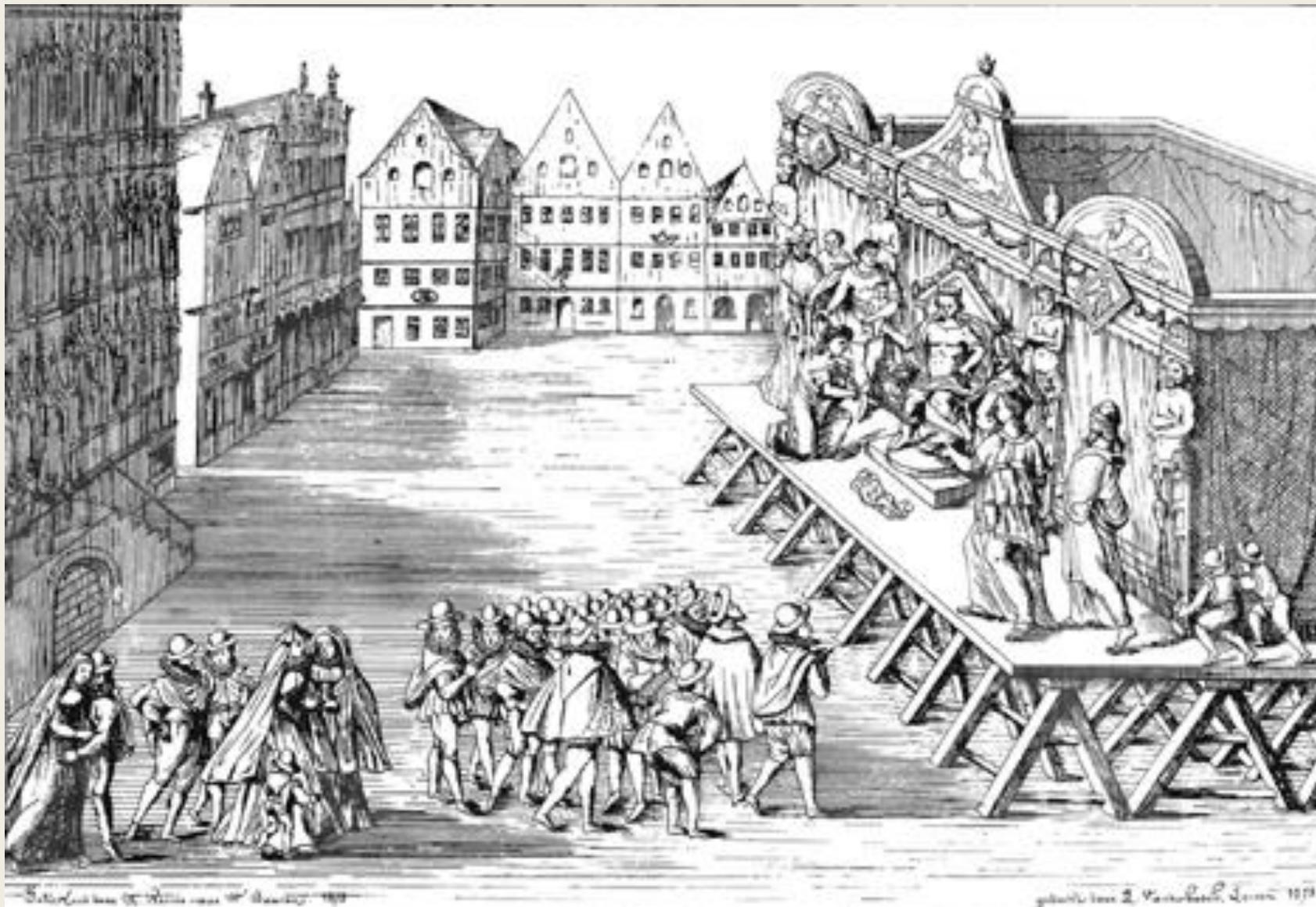


Image taken from <https://theatricaleffectsandstaging.wordpress.com/medieval-theatre-staging/>



# Characteristics of Medieval Theatre

- They used **staging techniques** passed on by the church (namely a series of mansions and a generalised acting space).
- Performances consisted of a sequence of short plays (tropes), each of which was complete within itself.
- The Bible determined the order of plays.
- Three plays of action (representing heaven, earth and hell), were arranged either horizontally or vertically in each series.
- A large amount of consideration was given to special effects, which were highly impressive and convincingly realistic.



# Activity 1:

1. Why was drama moved outdoors?
2. Name TWO changes that took place as medieval drama changed/developed.
3. The medieval performance space (outside the church) consisted of two types of stages. Name these two, and provide a short description of each.
4. Name TWO characteristics of Medieval Theatre.

