

# Feudalism and Manor Life

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. Feudalism governed how knights and nobles dealt with each other.
2. Feudalism spread through much of Europe.
3. The manor system dominated Europe's economy.
4. Towns and trade grew and helped end the feudal system.

### The Big Idea

A complex web of duties and obligations governed relationships between people in the Middle Ages.

### Key Terms and People

knights, p. 242

vassal, p. 243

feudalism, p. 243

William the Conqueror, p. 244

manor, p. 245

serfs, p. 245

Eleanor of Aquitaine, p. 246

## If YOU were there...

You are a peasant in the Middle Ages, living on the land of a noble. Although you and your family work very hard for many hours of the day, much of the food you grow goes to the noble and his family. Your house is very small, and it has a dirt floor. Your parents are tired and weak, and you wish you could do something to improve their lives.

**Is there any way you could change your life?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** Hard work was a constant theme in the lives of peasants in the Middle Ages. They worked long hours and had to obey the wishes of nobles. But most nobles weren't free to live as they chose either. They were sworn to obey more powerful nobles, who had to obey the wishes of the king. Life in the Middle Ages was one big web of duties and obligations.

## Feudalism Governs Knights and Nobles

When the Vikings, Magyars, and Muslims began their raids in the 800s, the Frankish kings were unable to defend their empire. Their army was too slow to defend against the lightning-fast attacks of their enemies. Because they couldn't depend on protection from their kings, nobles had to defend their own lands. As a result, the power of nobles grew, and kings became less powerful. In fact, some nobles became as powerful as the kings themselves. Although these nobles remained loyal to the king, they ruled their lands as independent territories.

## Knights and Land

To defend their lands, nobles needed soldiers. The best soldiers were **knights**, warriors who fought on horseback. However, knights needed weapons, armor, and horses. This equipment was expensive, and few people had money in the early Middle Ages.



**HSS 7.6.3** Understand the development of feudalism, its role in the medieval European economy, the way in which it was influenced by physical geography (the role of the manor and the growth of towns), and how feudal relationships provided the foundation of political order.



As a result, nobles gave knights fiefs (FEEFS), or pieces of land, instead of money for their military service. A noble who gave land to a knight in this way was called a lord.

In return for the land, a knight promised to support the noble in battle or in other matters. A knight who promised to support a lord in exchange for land was called a **vassal**. The vassal swore that he would always remain loyal to his lord. Historians call this system of promises that governed the relationships between lords and vassals **feudalism** (FYOO-duh-lih-zuhm).

### A Lord's Duties

The ties between lords and vassals were the heart of feudalism. Each group had certain responsibilities toward the other. A lord had to send help to his vassals if an enemy attacked. In addition, he had to be fair toward his vassals. He couldn't cheat them or punish them for no reason. If a lord failed to do what he was supposed to, his vassals could break all ties with him.

To defend their lands, many lords built castles. A castle is a large building with strong walls that can easily be defended against attacks. Early castles didn't look like the towering structures we see in movies and storybooks. Those great castles were built much later in the Middle Ages. Most early castles were made of wood, not stone. Nevertheless, these castles provided security in times of war.

### A Vassal's Duties

When a lord went to war, he called on his vassals to fight with him. But fighting wasn't a vassal's only duty. For example, vassals had to give their lords money on special occasions, such as when a lord's son became a knight or when his daughter got married. A vassal also had to give his lord food and shelter if he came to visit. If a vassal gained enough land, he could

become a lord. In this way a person might be both a lord and a vassal. A knight could also accept fiefs from two different lords and become a vassal to both. Feudal obligations could become confusing.

**READING CHECK** Sequencing What led to the creation of feudalism?

## Feudal Society

**QUICK  
FACTS**



### Kings and Queens

Kings and queens were the greatest lords of Europe, and all nobles and knights were their vassals.



### Nobles

Nobles were vassals of kings and queens. Many were also lords of lower-ranking nobles and knights.



### Knights

Knights served their noble lords in exchange for land.



### Peasants

Peasants owned no land, so they were not part of the feudal system. But many peasants worked on land owned by nobles or knights.

**ANALYSIS  
SKILL**

**ANALYZING VISUALS**

How could a noble be both a lord and a vassal?



## Feudalism Spreads

Feudalism was first created by the Franks. Before long the system began to spread into other kingdoms. In the 1000s, Frankish knights introduced feudalism into northern Italy, Spain, and Germany. Feudalism then spread into eastern Europe.

Feudalism also reached Britain in the 1000s. It was brought there by a French noble named William, who was the duke of Normandy in northern France, and who claimed a right to the English throne.

In 1066, William and his knights sailed into England and defeated the English king at the Battle of Hastings. After winning the battle, William declared himself the new king of England. He became known as **William the Conqueror**. To reward his knights for their part in the victory, William gave them large estates of land in his new country. This was the beginning of feudalism in England.

**READING CHECK** Sequencing How did feudalism spread to England?

### History Close-up

## Life on a Manor

Manors were large estates that developed in Europe during the Middle Ages. Many manors were largely self-sufficient, producing most of the food and goods they needed. This picture shows what a manor in Britain might have looked like.



The lord of the manor lived in a large stone house called the manor house.

Peasants grew vegetables in small gardens near their houses.

In the fall, peasants worked to harvest crops like wheat.



## The Manor System

When a knight received a fief from his lord, he needed a way to farm it. Knights were fighters who didn't have time to work in the fields. At the same time, peasants, or small farmers, needed to grow food to live. Very few peasants, however, owned any land.

As a result, a new economic system developed. Under this system, knights allowed peasants to farm land on their large estates. In return, the peasants had to give the knights food or other payment.

The large estate owned by a knight or lord was called a **manor**. In general, each manor included a large house or castle, pastures, fields, and forests. It also had a village where the peasants who worked on the manor lived.

### Peasants, Serfs, and Other Workers

Most medieval lords kept about one-fourth to one-third of their land for their own use. The rest of the land was divided among peasants and **serfs**—workers who were tied to the land on which they lived.



ANALYSIS  
SKILL

ANALYZING VISUALS

What goods can you see being produced on this manor?

Harvested wheat was taken to the mill and ground into flour, which was used to make bread.

The village blacksmith made iron tools for farming.

Sheep grazed on grassy fields, and villagers used sheep's wool to make clothes.

The village church was built on a small piece of land that belonged to the lord.



Although they weren't slaves, serfs weren't allowed to leave their land without the lord's permission. Serfs spent much of their time working in their lords' fields. In return for this work, they got a small piece of land to farm for themselves. They also received their lords' protection against outlaws and raiders.

The lives of serfs and peasants weren't easy. Farm labor was hard, and they often worked in the fields late into the night. Men did most of the farming. Women made clothing, cooked, grew vegetables, and gathered firewood. Even children worked, tending sheep and chickens.

In addition to peasants and serfs, most manors had several skilled workers. These workers traded their goods and services to the peasants in exchange for food. Lords wanted the people who lived on the manor to produce everything they needed, including food and clothing.

#### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

role assigned  
behavior



### BIOGRAPHY

#### Eleanor of Aquitaine

1122?-1204

Eleanor of Aquitaine was one of the most powerful people of the Middle Ages. She ruled Aquitaine, a region in southwestern France, as the king's vassal. In 1137 Eleanor became queen of France when she married King Louis VII. Later, she divorced Louis and became queen of England by marrying King Henry II of England. Even while she was queen of England, she spent much of her time ruling her own territory. Eleanor had many children, and two of her sons later became kings of England.

#### Drawing Conclusions

Why do you think Eleanor had more power than other women in the Middle Ages?

### Manor Lords

The lord of a manor controlled everything that happened on his lands. His word was law. The lord resolved any disputes that arose on the manor and punished people who misbehaved. He also collected taxes from the people who lived on his manor.

As you would expect, manor lords and ladies lived more comfortably than other people on the manor. They had servants and large houses. Still, their lives weren't easy. Lords who survived diseases faced the possibility of being killed in war.

### Women in the Middle Ages

Regardless of their social class, women in the Middle Ages had fewer rights than men. Women generally had to obey the wishes of their fathers or husbands. But women still had important **roles** in society. As you have read, peasant women worked to support their families. Noblemen also had duties. They ran manor households and supervised servants. Women governed manors when their husbands went to war. Some noblemen, like the French woman **Eleanor of Aquitaine**, had great political power. Other women who wanted power and influence joined the most powerful of institutions, the Christian Church.

**READING CHECK** **Contrasting** How were the lives of nobles and peasants different?

### Towns and Trade Grow

In the Middle Ages, most people lived on manors or on small farms, not in towns. As a result, most towns were small. After about 1000, however, this situation began to change. Some towns became big cities. At the same time, new towns appeared.

What led to the growth of medieval towns? For one thing, Europe's population increased, partly because more food was



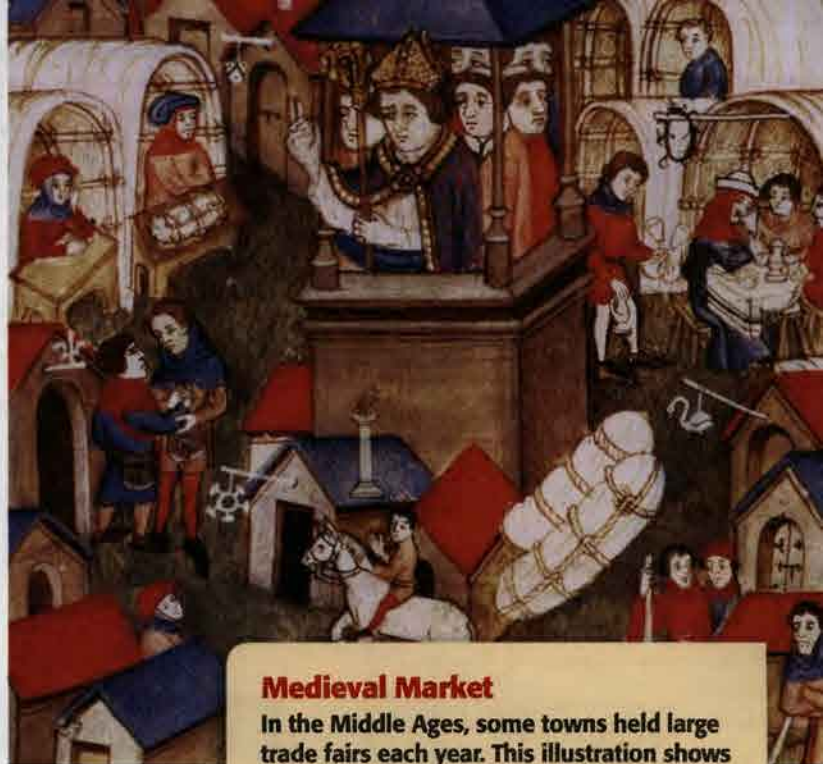
available. New technology helped farmers produce larger harvests than ever before. Among these improvements was a heavier plow. With this plow farmers could dig deeper into the soil, helping their plants grow better. Another new device, the horse collar, allowed farmers to plow fields using horses. In times past, farmers had used oxen, which were strong but slow. With horses, farmers could tend larger fields, grow more food, and feed more people.

Towns also grew because trade increased. As Europe's population grew, so did trade. Trade routes spread all across Europe. Merchants also brought goods from Asia and Africa to sell in markets in Europe. The chance to make money in trade led many people to leave their farms and move to cities, causing cities to grow even larger.

In time, the growth of trade led to the decline of feudalism. Knights began to demand money for their services instead of land. At the same time, serfs and peasants left their manors for towns, slowly weakening the manor system.

#### READING CHECK Identifying Cause and Effect

Why did towns and trade grow in the Middle Ages?



#### Medieval Market

In the Middle Ages, some towns held large trade fairs each year. This illustration shows a bishop blessing a trade fair in France.

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** In this section, you learned about European feudalism and the social and economic relationships it created among people. In the next section, you'll read about how this system compares to one that developed halfway around the world in Japan.

## Section 3 Assessment

go.hrw.com  
**Online Quiz**

KEYWORD: SQ7 HP9

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People HSS 7.6.3

- Define** What was a knight?
  - Explain** Why did vassals have to serve lords?
  - Elaborate** Do you think knights or lords benefited more from feudalism? Why?
- Explain** How did William the Conqueror help spread feudalism?
- Describe** What was a typical manor like?
  - Elaborate** How do you think most serfs felt about the manor system?
- Recall** What led to the growth of Europe's population in the Middle Ages?
  - Draw Conclusions** Why do you think many peasants left their farms for cities?

### Critical Thinking

- Analyzing** Draw a flow chart like the one below. In each box, list the responsibilities that each group had toward the other.



### FOCUS ON WRITING

- Writing about Knights** Take notes on the knights described in this section and how what you've learned will affect your search for knights. What kinds of people will you hire? How will you pay them? Write your answers in your notebook.