

Feudal Life

Feudalism is the system of loyalties and protections in the middle Ages. It can be pictured as a pyramid. The king is at the top. Everyone owed loyalty and service to the king. Next came the powerful nobles, who controlled most of the land. Below them came the lesser nobles, or vassals. They owed loyalty to the more powerful nobles. The kings and powerful nobles gave the lesser nobles land called fiefs in return for military service. The serfs were at the very bottom of the pyramid. They worked on the land that belonged to nobles. They were treated badly and were not free. When someone backs out of the system, it's called Breach of Contract. Breach of Contract means that he broke his promise. When a peasants or a vassal fails to do his duty for the lord, the lord could bring charges against him in his court.

The kings lacked enough resources to maintain the administrative control of the territory and an I exercise appropriate, reason why they granted the noblemen the territorial property in benefit in payment for the services of the population's defense. The nobility achieved the king to accept that the borrowed lands can be inherited, for what you/they ended up to become property. The given territory was the feud and who received it he/she was the vassal. The feudal gentlemen assumed functions that up to now alone they corresponded the king, they acted as if was local kings. The feudal gentlemen were at the same time the king's vassals and gentlemen of their own vassals. The delivery of the feud to a vassal you toward in the homage ceremony. The feudalism became the political and social organization then of most of Europe.

The feudal monarchy. With the decomposition of the empire Carolingian, the gentlemen but important they enlarged every time but their power and they became kings creating their own Kingdom. The king was above all the testaments. But this he/she was not always the feudal but powerful gentleman of their Kingdom. To consolidate their power and to increase their patrimony, some kings that had the support of the church, had to fight against the power of their vassals or to practice a skilled matrimonial politics.

Lords owned pieces of lands that were given to them by kings. The kings gave them lands if they promised to provide knights in wars and support the military. Every lord had a mill, and would earn money when the peasants paid him to use it. They earned money by that way. Sometimes men who owned land would turn it over to a lord in exchange for protection. These men became peasants. All the people that lived on the lords' land owed loyalty to him.

Noble Lesser nobles were also called vassals. They were a step down from the powerful nobles, so they had to be loyal to them. Both kings and the powerful nobles gave the vassals gifts of land in return for military service. Those lands were called fiefs. The vassals were only a step above the serfs, so they were not really rich. Vassals gave the lord knights to protect his land and the lord himself.

Knighthood under feudalism.

The main service that the vassals owed his lord was military. Vassals had to supply them a certain number of knights for a certain number of days each year. Vassals were lords of the knights. Sometimes a vassal-lord would grant his knights parts of his own fief. Then the knights also became vassals. This practice was called subinfeudation. After some time, there were lots of layers of feudal relation that separated the knights and the king. Between them were many different levels of lords. Each one was a vassal of the lord that was a step higher than him. Eventually, the growth of the cities and industry led to the end of the feudal system.

Relationship between Knights

Eventually a legal hierarchy of titles was created, based on generally accepted relationship between lords and vassals. At the top was the emperor or king, or both. The person at the top was considered to

be the sovereign lord. He, in theory, was the actual "owner" of all the land within his loosely designated region. Firm boundaries around a contiguous piece of real estate did not exist. A sovereign's kingdom or empire could consist of widely scattered pieces of land and territory.

The entire territory of kingdom was broken up into smaller territories. These were known as fiefs. They had been granted by the sovereign or lord to a subordinate vassal. The large fiefs were in the hands of a so-called vassals-in-chief. There only a few of these. Further down the ladder there were many more smaller fiefs held by individual vassals. These could be further divided into even smaller fiefs in an almost unlimited fashion. This process of division and subdivision was known as subinfeudation. It led to the much deplored scattering of power and reduction of efficiency. It tended to weaken the unifying strength of the sovereign.

At the very bottom was the simple knight in shining armor – or rusty armor, for that matter. So, what you have here is a feudal pyramid, starting with the king at the top and descending down to increasingly numerous dukes, counts, viscounts, barons, earls or margraves. While there was considerable uniformity in this pyramid, it did differ from one region to another. Classic feudalism is generally believed to have existed in northeastern France. In Germany it was somewhat different and in eastern Europe and Russia it hardly existed at all. Full-fledged feudalism did not come to England until after the Norman invasion of 1066. In southern and south-eastern Europe you have pale reflections of the classic French model.

The peasants' worked on the lords lands. There were two kinds of peasants those who were free and those who weren't. The un free peasants were called serfs. They are almost like slaves. They had to obey their lord completely, had no freedom, and had to work on his land. A serf could buy his freedom from the lord or run away, but they might get caught.

Peasants had tasks such as plowing, getting in harvest, washing sheep, and carting goods. Because medieval farming needed lots of labor work, many peasants had to work on the lands. They had no part in arranging Feudalism. The life of nobles counted on the labors of the peasants, while the life of the peasants depended on the safety provided for them by the lords. The lord told the peasants what they are to do for the day in the morning. In return for their work, the lord would give them a hut close to his land. Peasants exchanged their labors for protection by the lord.

Feudal Contract

The granting and receiving of fiefs was confirmed by a contract. An oath of homage and fealty sealed it. It was one of the most important feudal ceremonies. Swearing homage meant that the vassal was to be the lord's men until death. Faithfulness in service to the lord was a matter of life and death literally. Upon the death of the vassal, the oath was formally renewed with the vassals heir. It was a deeply personal and binding contract that few dared to break.

The basic element of the feudal contract was an exchange of rights over land, given by the lord, for military and other honorable services, given by the vassal. While the contract was taken quite seriously, it was not in writing. Solemn promise was good enough and also made it more personal. But the fact that it was not in writing led to frequent quarrels over the exact duties and obligations which had been incurred. It should be obvious by now that these contracts varied considerably in terms of detail, if not in overall uniformity.

So, the vassal swore to be lord's "man" and the lord swore to defend the vassal's cause and protect him from unlawful molestation. The vassal also agreed to make certain money payments: when his daughter married, for instance, or when his son was knighted, to give just two examples. The vassal was obliged to attend the lord's court, whenever he decided to get the boys together for a palaver or merely to make himself feel important. Court could also be held in a more formal legal sense. In these situations the methods of the

judicial process, if you can call it that, were very simple and crude.

While fiefs were not hereditary in the beginning, they gradually and frequently became hereditary. The holding of a fief was considered to be both an office and private property. As private property a fief could, of course be divided, whereas an office could not be divided. This situation led to the practice of primogeniture. This simply means that the oldest son always inherits the office, although the property that goes with it can be divided among all the heirs, if the holder decides to divide it. This also was fertile ground for discontent and conflict. It contributed to what has been called "feudal chaos" and produced all too frequent warfare. One obvious example is the invasion of England by the Duke of Normandy and the famous Battle of Hastings. The start of the Hundred Years War between England and France is another case in point. There are many other examples