

WORLD HISTORY

People & Nations

❖ ANCIENT WORLD ❖



HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON



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As chaos engulfed medieval Europe, the Vikings continued their conquests, trading with the strong and pillaging the weak. Skilled in siege operations, they sometimes captured strongly fortified towns. Often savage and cruel, the Vikings seem to have enjoyed battle. They used their axes and swords to strike terror into people everywhere.

The Vikings' customs and myths centered on the pagan Norse gods. Archaeologists have excavated Viking burial mounds in Europe that include boats and implements to be used in the afterlife. Sometimes, instead of burial, the Vikings placed the dead person in a boat and burned it. In 922 an Arab, Ibn Fadlan, attended the funeral of a Viking chieftain on the Volga River. A historian wrote the following description about Fadlan's experience:

“A girl slave volunteered to be burned with her master, Ibn Fadlan relates. His ship was hauled onto land and wood placed beneath. A tent was raised on deck and a brocaded mattress set on it. The richly clothed corpse was seated on the mattress...

On the day of the burial,...the slave girl said, ‘Lo, I see my lord and master he calls to me. Let me go to him.’ Aboard the ship waited the old woman called the Angel of Death, who would kill her. The girl drank from a cup of nabidh and sang a long song. She grew fearful and hesitant. At once the old woman grasped her head and led her into the tent.

Inside the tent the girl died beside her master by stabbing and strangling. Then the ship was fired.”

Section 1 Review

- 1. Define** Middle Ages, medieval
- 2. Identify** Clovis, Merovingians, Charles Martel, Pepin the Short, Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, Magyars, Vikings
- 3. Locate and Explain the Significance** Papal States, Aix-la-Chapelle
- 4. Summarizing Ideas (a)** What were the accomplishments of Clovis? **(b)** of Charles Martel? **(c)** of Charlemagne?
- 5. Evaluating Ideas** Why did Charlemagne's empire disintegrate? What actions might his successors have taken to hold the empire together?
- 6. Interpreting Ideas** Why were the Vikings feared more than other invaders?

Feudalism and the Manorial System

Focus Questions

- How did the feudal system and the manorial system complement each other?
- What was life like for the serfs and for the nobility on the manor?
- What were the characteristics of the code of chivalry?

On the continent of Europe, organized government again disappeared within a century after Charlemagne's death in 814. Europe became a continent of small, independent local governments. We call the political structure that evolved in Europe **feudalism**. This was a system in which kings and powerful nobles granted land to other nobles in return for loyalty, military assistance, and other services, and it was firmly established in northern France by the end of the A.D. 900s. By the middle 1000s, feudalism had become the way of life throughout most of western Europe.

Feudalism

The feudal system arose in the absence of a strong central government. Kings held large territories, but they had little power to withstand the invasions of Vikings and other peoples. In return for much-needed military help, weak kings gave grants of land to nobles. The nobles, who often had more land than they needed, then granted part of this land to their own knights—mounted warriors—in return for military service and other forms of support.

The person who granted land was called a lord. The person who received land in return for services was a **vassal**. The grant of land was called a **fief**. This term comes from the Latin word *feudum*, which gave rise to the word *feudal*. The granting and holding of a fief was really a contract between lord and vassal. Because a piece of land could also be further divided—a king's vassal might grant land to knights, for example—a person could be a lord and a vassal at the same time.

In time, the fief became hereditary. Legal ownership passed from the lord to his son, while legal possession and use passed from the vassal to his son. By about 1100, a system called **primogeniture**



This stained-glass window depicts the relationship between a lord and his vassals; land was granted in return for military services and loyalty.

(pry-moh-JE-nuh-choohr) in which the eldest son always inherited the fief, had become customary. This system kept fiefs from being endlessly subdivided among many sons.

Women had some influence in society and politics, but their legal property rights were limited. A woman could include fiefs in her dowry. However, her husband would take over the dowry, and she controlled it only after he died.

Local lords held many of the same powers that are usually associated with government, and the king became just another feudal lord. In theory every holder of land became a vassal to the king, however, in practice the king really had power only over those who lived on the king's feudal lands.

The church, too, became part of the feudal system. By the 900s the church owned vast amounts of land, some of which it granted as fiefs to nobles in return for military protection.

Feudal relationships. There are three facts to keep in mind to understand the relationship between lord and vassal:

First, it was an honorable relationship between legal equals. Only nobles could be vassals. The greater lords were vassals and tenants of the king. The less powerful lords were vassals and tenants of the greater lords, and so on down.

Second, the same man might be both vassal and lord—vassal to a more powerful lord above him and lord to a less powerful vassal below him.

Third, the relationship was a very personal one. Each man's loyalties and obligations were owed only to the lord immediately above him or to the vassal immediately below him.

Obligations of feudalism. Under a feudal contract, the vassal had more obligations than the lord. The vassal promised to provide the lord with a certain number of fully equipped cavalry riders and infantry soldiers.

The vassal had to make special payments to help cover the lord's extraordinary expenses, such as ransom if the lord became a captive in war. The vassal also had to house and feed the lord and his companions for a certain number of days of each year and serve on the lord's court to administer justice.

Feudal justice. Feudal justice was quite different from Roman justice. Decisions at trials were made in one of three ways: (1) In a trial by battle, the accused and the accuser—or men representing them—fought a duel. The outcome of the duel determined guilt or innocence. (2) In compurgation, or oath taking, the accused and the accuser each gathered a group of people who swore that the man they represented was telling the truth. Compurgators, the oath takers, were similar to the character witnesses who testify in today's trials. (3) In a trial by ordeal, the accused carried a piece of hot iron in his hand, walked through fire, or plunged his arm into a pot of boiling water to pick up a hot stone. If his wounds healed rapidly, he was judged innocent; otherwise, he was guilty.

Warfare. Frequent wars plagued the medieval period. Sometimes two kingdoms fought. At other times, a king tried to subdue a powerful, rebellious vassal. Many wars, however, stemmed from private fights between feudal lords or between lords and vassals.

In the early Middle Ages, a knight wore an iron helmet and a shirt of chain mail—small metal links hooked together to form flexible armor. The knight carried a sword, a large shield, and a lance. Armor became more complicated in later medieval times after gunpowder was introduced, and metal plates replaced chain mail. This armor was so heavy that a knight often had to be hauled onto his horse with a crane.

For nobles, wars represented opportunities for glory and wealth, but to the rest of society wars brought suffering and famine. The church tried to limit private wars by issuing several decrees, known together as the Peace of God. These decrees prohibited, under pain of excommunication, acts of violence and private warfare near churches and other holy buildings. They also forbade violence against cattle and agricultural equipment, as well as against certain persons, including clergy, women, merchants, and pilgrims. The church tried to get all lords to accept another decree, the Truce of God, which forbade fighting on certain days, such as weekends and holy days. Gradually other days were added to the Truce of God. Restrictions on fighting, however, could almost

never be strictly enforced. Private wars continued until kings became strong enough to stop them.

The Manorial System

While feudalism was essentially a governmental and military system, the manorial system became the economic structure in many parts of Europe. The **manor**, a large estate that included the manor house, pastures, fields, and a village, became the economic unit of the early Middle Ages, just as the fief had become the governmental unit. While a small fief had only one manor, large fiefs had several.

Because no central authority or organized trade existed, each manor tried to be self-sufficient, or able to produce everything it needed. Most manors produced their own food, clothing, and leather goods. Only a few items—such as iron, salt, tar, or wine—were purchased.

The lord and several peasants shared the land of a manor. The lord kept about one third of the manor land, called the domain, for himself. The peasants paid to use the remaining two thirds of the land. They gave the lord a portion of their crops, helped to farm his land, performed other services on the manor, and paid many kinds of taxes.

A typical manor village, usually on a stream that furnished water power for its mill, had houses clustered together for safety a short distance away from the manor house or castle. The land of the manor extended out from the village and included vegetable plots, cultivated fields, pastures, and forests.

The cultivated land of the manor was often divided into three large fields for growing grain. Only two of the three fields were planted each year so that the third field could lie fallow, or unplanted, to regain its fertility. The three large fields in turn were divided into small strips. Peasants had their own strips in each field. If the lord's domain was divided, he too had strips in each field.

Peasant Life

Most of the peasants on a manor were **serfs**, people who were bound to the land. Serfs could not leave the land without the lord's permission. Serfs were not slaves, however, for they could not be sold away from the land. If the land was granted to a new lord, the serfs became the new lord's tenants.

Some free people, too, rented land from the lord. Free people included the skilled workers necessary to the village economy, such as millers, blacksmiths, and carpenters. Most villages also had a priest to provide for the spiritual needs of the villagers.



In the medieval illuminated book *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, the Limbourg Brothers depict scenes of people engaged in various activities throughout the seasons. This page, from January, shows the Duke of Berry at a banquet.

Long hours spent doing backbreaking work in the fields made daily life on a manor very hard. The laborers' meager diet consisted mainly of coarse black bread, cabbage and a few other vegetables, cheese, and eggs. Beer was plentiful in northern Europe, as was wine in the grape-growing regions of the south. People rarely ate meat because they needed animals to help them work the fields and because they were not allowed to hunt on the lord's land.

The life of ordinary people was brief and narrow in medieval times. Because of disease, starvation, and constant warfare, the average life expectancy was about 30 years. Since people in their forties were regarded as very old, medieval society was a much younger society than ours. Ordinary people rarely escaped the village. They usually died where they had been born.

The Life of the Nobility

When people today think of the Middle Ages, they sometimes picture luxurious castles and knights in burnished armor. However, the nobles did not necessarily lead luxurious or even easy lives.

A castle—the fortified home of a lord—served as a base from which to protect the surrounding countryside and enforce the lord's authority. Most people today picture a castle as a great stone structure. Actually, stone castles were not constructed until late in the Middle Ages. Throughout the early medieval period, castles were relatively simple structures built of earth and wood.

Located on hills or in other places that were easy to defend, castles were built to resist attack, not for pleasant living. If a castle had to be built in flat country, a ditch called a moat, often filled with water, surrounded the outer walls. A drawbridge across the moat enabled people to reach the gate to the courtyard inside the walls. In case of an attack, the drawbridge was raised.

The main part of the castle was the keep—a strong tower that contained storerooms, barracks, and workshops. Sometimes the keep also included the lord's living quarters. In the great hall, the lord received visitors. The thick walls, with their small, usually glassless windows, made the rooms dark, damp, and chilly. The lord spent much of his day looking after his land and dispensing justice to his vassals and serfs.

A man, whether he was a lord or the head of a peasant family, depended a great deal on help from his wife and children. Medieval people viewed marriage

as a way to advance one's fortunes, perhaps by acquiring new lands. On the other hand, marriage usually produced children, who had to be cared for. A lord had to provide a dowry for a daughter.

When not fighting, the nobles and vassals amused themselves with mock battles called tournaments. In early medieval times tournaments often led to loss of life, but later they became more like pageants.

Chivalry

By the late 1100s **chivalry**, a code of conduct for knights, had changed feudal society. The word *chivalry* comes from the French word *cheval*, meaning "horse," because knights were mounted soldiers.

In the early days, becoming a knight was quite simple. Any soldier could be knighted by any other knight after proving himself in battle. As time passed, however, chivalry became much more complex.

To become a knight, a boy had to go through two preliminary stages of training, supervised by a knight. First, at the age of seven, a boy became a page, or knight's attendant, learning knightly manners and beginning his training in the use of weapons. Then, in his early teens, the boy became a squire, or knight's assistant. He continued to study both manners and weaponry. He took care of the knight's horses, armor, weapons, and clothing. When he was considered ready, the squire accompanied the knight into battle. After the squire proved himself worthy in battle, an elaborate religious ceremony initiated him into knighthood.

When a knight was in full armor, practically the only way to recognize him was by his coat of arms. A coat of arms might be painted on a shield or an outer coat; it might also be visible on a flag or on the trappings of the knight's horse. Every coat of arms was different and identified the knight. Crests were sometimes worn on the tops of helmets.

Chivalry required a knight to be brave. He had to fight fairly. Tricks and strategy were considered cowardly. A knight had to be loyal to his friends, keep his word, and treat conquered foes gallantly. In addition, he had to be especially courteous to women.

Chivalry greatly improved the rough and crude manners of early feudal lords. Behavior, however, did not become perfect by any modern standards. The knight extended courtesy only to people of his own class. Toward all others his attitude and actions were likely to be coarse and arrogant.

Thinking About History: Distinguishing a Fact from a Value Statement

A fact can be verified or proved. A value statement is an opinion that represents a particular point of view. For example, a writer can state that Charlemagne was a successful ruler. That statement is a value statement because it is based upon the writer's definition of success.

Sometimes a fact and a value statement may be included in the same sentence. For example, an author might state that Charlemagne spoke Latin and Greek so eloquently that he could have taught both languages. Charlemagne's mastery of the two languages is a fact that can be verified or disproved. However, the degree of his eloquence in the two languages is a matter of opinion. In your study of history, and later as you assume the responsibilities of citizenship, such as voting, it is important for you to be able to distinguish between facts and value statements.

How to Distinguish a Fact from a Value Statement

To distinguish a fact from a value statement, follow these steps.

1. Review the difference between a fact and a value statement.
2. Identify clue words that suggest values. For example, adjectives such as *great*, *wonderful*, and *horrible* are words that express feelings. "I" statements such as *I believe* or *In my opinion* indicate a point of view.
3. Ask questions about the sentence. Is it open to more than one interpretation? Does it contain feeling words or "I" statements?

Developing the Skill

The statement below discusses how best to define feudalism. Which sentences contain facts? Which sentences contain value statements?

"The simplest way will be to begin by saying what feudal society was not. Although the obligations arising from blood-relationship played a very active part in it, it did not rely on kinship alone...feudal ties...developed when those of kinship proved inadequate..."

European feudalism should therefore be seen as the outcome of the violent dissolution of older societies. It would in fact be unintelli-



Farming on the manor

gible without the great upheaval of the Germanic invasions which, by forcibly uniting two societies originally at very different stages of development, disrupted both of them and brought to the surface a great many...social practices of an extremely primitive character."

In this excerpt, the author emphasizes the social and economic aspects of feudalism. He begins by stating a fact: feudalism did not rely on kinship alone. You know from reading this chapter that this statement is a fact because lord-vassal relations often did not depend on kinship. The value statements are those which include words such as *simplest*, *unintelligible*, and *primitive*. These statements are open to interpretation and depend on the definitions and data the author provides.

Practicing the Skill

Select a newspaper article about a person or a current event. Then identify the facts and the value statements.

To apply this skill, see *Applying History Study Skills* on page 249.

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EPILOGUE **MODERN WORLD**



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