

Feudalism: A Social and Political System Student Worksheet

Introduction:

Citizens of Europe during the Middle Ages were very concerned with safety and protection from external enemies. Consequently, small communities formed around local lords or masters. Most people lived on a *manor*, which consisted of a castle, a church, a village, and the surrounding farmland. Manors were usually isolated, although they occasionally would receive visits from peddlers, pilgrims on their way to the Crusades, soldiers from other fiefdoms, or others.

In this “feudal” system, the king awarded land grants, or “fiefs,” to the most important nobles, barons, and church bishops. In return, they provided the king with political, economic, and military support. The lowest class of feudal society was the peasants, who were also known as “serfs” or “villeins.” In exchange for living and working on his land, known as the “demesne,” the lord offered the peasants his protection.

Directions:

Feudal Oaths of Fidelity

Go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/feud-oath1.html> and answer the following questions:

1. Who is taking the first oath, “An Anglo Saxon Form of Commendation”?
2. This oath states that the person taking it promises not to do “...anything which is displeasing to him [the lord].” What problems might arise in the future from such a general statement?
3. Who is taking the second oath “Acceptance of an Antrusian”?
4. *Antrustions* were bodyguards or members of the military entourage of a lord or king. What is the significance of the lord’s statement that a vassal swearing an oath to him would be “counted with the number of antrustions”?
5. A *wergild* was an amount of money a man’s family could accept in place of vengeance if he were to be killed. Given this definition, what do you think is meant by the following phrase in the oath: “...if anyone perchance should presume to kill him, let him know that he will be judged guilty of his wergild of 600 shillings”?

Charter of Homage and Fealty, 1110

Go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/atton1.html> and answer the following questions:

6. Why does the Viscount of Carcassonne pledge this oath in the presence of his sons and others and why has it been written by a monk (John)?

7. When the oath uses the term “successors,” to whom is it referring?
8. How does an oath of fealty differ from an oath of fidelity?
9. Cite examples of when oaths are used in modern society. In what ways are these oaths the same or different from medieval oaths?

French Book of Hours, the *Très Riches Heures*

Go to <http://www.navigo.com/wm/rh/img/march.jpg> and answer the following questions:

10. Why does the farmland seem to be divided?
11. Which class of feudal society is shown working the fields around the Manor? What visual elements assist you in identifying their class?
12. On what part of the land is the Manor house set? Why might it have been set there?
13. What methods of security can you see in this image?

Now go to <http://www.navigo.com/wm/rh/img/august.jpg>

14. Which class of feudal society do you believe the people on the horses represent? Cite visual elements from the image that support your conclusion.