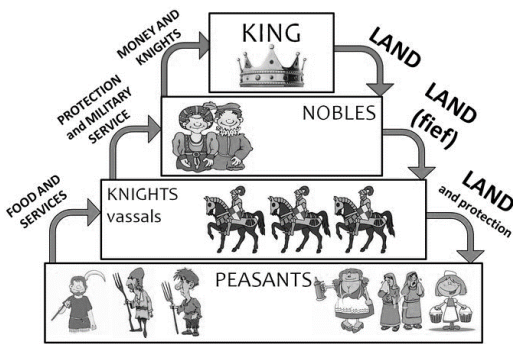


Medieval Europe (the Middle Ages: 500 CE – 1400 CE)



Feudalism

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire around 500 CE, most of Europe was threatened by invasions and internal conflict. But, Europeans developed a new system to help them defend themselves. This new social and political system was called **feudalism**. Feudalism was a system where powerful local leaders owned large sections of land. Feudalism was common in Europe from around 500 CE to about 1400 CE - a time known as the Middle Ages.

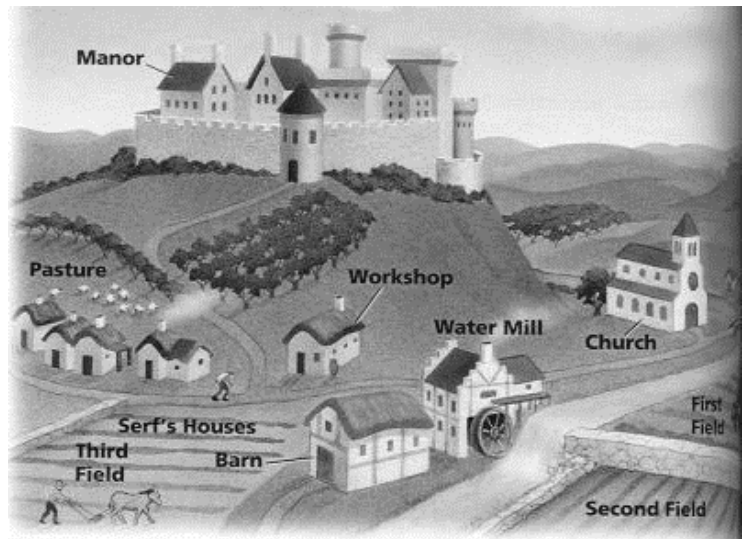
The most important resource in medieval Europe was land. Local leaders that owned large sections of land were known as **lords**. And

the most important lord was the **king** or **queen**. They controlled the country and decided when to fight wars against other countries. The lords divided their land among less powerful lords, called **nobles**, making them their vassals. (A **vassal** was a person who received land from a lord in exchange for their loyalty.) In exchange for the land, the nobles promised loyalty and military service to the king or queen.

Because there was often war in medieval Europe, some lesser lords trained to become armored fighters that rode on horses. These medieval warriors were called **knights**. Knights studied how to ride horses and how to use weapons to protect their lords. Knights also practiced a strict code of rules called **chivalry**. Chivalry was a *code* (group of rules) that required knights to be brave and loyal to their nobles. Chivalry also said that knights should protect women. At this time, most European women did not have many rights or opportunities.

Each group of people in feudal European society had special responsibilities. For example, most of the **peasants/serfs** (farmers) had to farm the land and produce food for the lord and the knights. (Unlike peasants, serfs were “bound” to land and could be bought or sold with it.) Peasants and serfs also did other work, like repairing roads and fences. In exchange for their service, the lord allowed them to use some of the land for their own food and the lord also promised to protect them. The life of peasants and serfs was very difficult. Peasant men, women, and children worked long hours. Because of their hard jobs and the lack of good health care, most peasants did not live past their mid-30s.

While the social and political system of medieval Europe was called feudalism, the *economic* system of the Middle Ages was called **manorialism** or the **manor system**. Manorialism was centered around the lord’s large house, called a **manor**. The lord, powerful local leader, was usually a noble or a knight. Lords controlled all of the land around the manor, including the village. Peasants and serfs worked the land surrounding the **manor** to support themselves and their lord.



Manorialism

Because of manorialism, each village was self-sufficient. **Self-sufficient** means that the villages produced most of the things they needed: food, clothing, tools, etc. This self-sufficiency was good for the village, but it also limited trade in Western Europe, meaning there were fewer new ideas and innovations.