

Being Knighted on the Battlefield

A young man of good family has been trained in warfare. He has proven himself in battle, bravely assisting the knight he serves. Now, as another battle looms, his knightly master tells the young squire to kneel. The knight strikes the young man on the shoulder with the flat of his sword or his glove, and says "I make you knight." As his sponsor, the older knight also presents the young man with a sword and spurs. Now the young man is ready to fight for his lord. He has achieved a place of both honor and responsibility in the medieval world: he has become a knight.

Focus Question How did feudalism and the manor economy emerge and shape medieval life?



A monarch knights a young man on the battlefield.

Feudalism and the Manor Economy

Objectives

- Describe how feudalism shaped medieval society.
- Describe the life of knights and nobles.
- Analyze how the economic system of the manor worked and how it affected peasants and nobles.

Terms, People, and Places

- feudalism
- tournament
- chivalry
- troubadour
- manor
- serf

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas Use a chart to keep track of the main ideas of this section. Write the main idea of each red heading in the appropriate box.

Feudalism and the Manor Economy		
Feudalism	The World of Knights and Nobles	The Manor

Not all squires were knighted in battle. Others went through elaborate public ceremonies in which their responsibilities were carefully spelled out. Medieval society was a network of mutual obligations. Even kings and nobles exchanged vows of loyalty and service before witnesses. These vows were part of a new political and economic system that governed European life during the Middle Ages.

Feudalism Develops

In the face of invasions by Vikings, Muslims, and Magyars, kings and emperors were too weak to maintain law and order. People needed protection for themselves, their homes, and their lands. In response to this basic need for protection, a decentralized political and economic structure evolved, known as feudalism. **Feudalism** was a loosely organized system of rule in which powerful local lords divided their landholdings among lesser lords. In exchange, these lesser lords, or **vassals**, pledged service and loyalty to the greater lord. The way feudalism was put into practice varied from place to place and changed over time.

Mutual Obligations The political and economic relationship between lords and vassals was based on the exchange of land for loyalty and military service. It was established by custom and tradition and by an exchange of pledges known as the **feudal contract**. Under this system, a powerful lord granted his vassal a **fief** (feef), or estate. Fiefs ranged from a few acres to hundreds of square miles. In addition to the land itself, the fief included peasants to work the land, as well as any towns or buildings on it.

Vocabulary Builder

aristocrats—(uh RIS tuh krats) *n.*
members of the nobility

As part of this agreement, the lord promised to protect his vassal. In return, the vassal pledged loyalty to his lord. He also agreed to provide the lord with 40 days of military service each year, certain money payments, and advice.

A Structured Society All **aristocrats** had a place in this structure of power. Below the monarch were powerful lords, such as dukes and counts, who held the largest fiefs. Each of these lords had vassals, and these vassals in turn had their own vassals. In many cases, the same man was both vassal and lord—vassal to a more powerful lord above him and lord to a less powerful vassal below him.

Because vassals often held fiefs from more than one lord, relationships between them grew very complex. A vassal who had pledged loyalty to several lords could have serious problems if his overlords quarreled with each other. What was he to do if both demanded his aid? To solve this problem, a vassal usually had a liege lord to whom he owed his first loyalty.

✔ **Checkpoint** What was the relationship between lords and vassals?

The World of Knights and Nobles

For medieval nobles, warfare was a way of life. Rival lords battled constantly for power. Many nobles began training in boyhood for a future occupation as a **knight**, or mounted warrior.

● INFOGRAPHIC

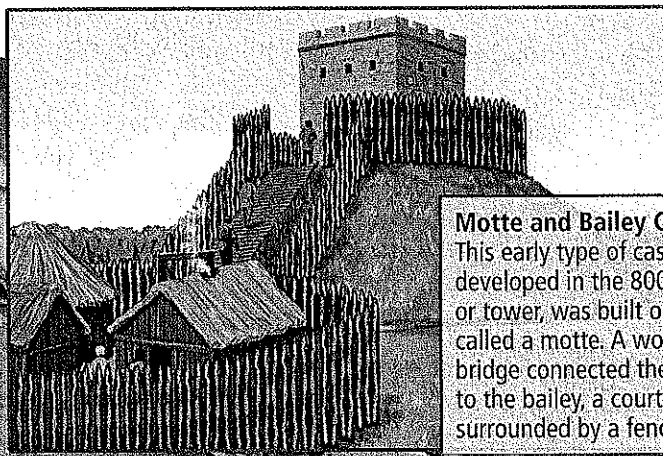
DEFENDING A CASTLE

Castles were made for defense. They were large complexes where many people and their supplies could hold out for long periods. They had strong, thick stone walls. A drawbridge over the castle moat—a ditch filled with water—could be raised in case of attack.

One way to capture a castle was by siege: the enemy would surround the castle and wait until the defenders' food ran out and they had to surrender. But soldiers could also attack by going over, through, or under the castle's defenses. Some attackers filled in the moat with stones or tunneled under the walls to weaken them until they collapsed. More often, they shot flaming arrows or hurled large stones over the walls. Some tried to go over the walls or to break down the gates.

Catapult

A type of catapult called a trebuchet (TREB yoo shet) could hurl stones weighing 600 pounds (270 kilograms) as far as 1,000 feet (300 meters).



Motte and Bailey Castle

This early type of castle was developed in the 800s. A keep, or tower, was built on a hill called a motte. A wooden bridge connected the motte to the bailey, a courtyard surrounded by a fence.

Battering Ram

Inside this hut on wheels was a huge log which soldiers used to break down the thick castle gate.

Knights and Warfare At the age of seven, a boy slated to become a knight was sent away to the castle of his father's lord. There, he learned to ride and fight. He also learned to keep his armor and weapons in good condition. Training was difficult and discipline was strict. Any laziness was punished with an angry blow or even a severe beating.

With his training finished, the youth was dubbed a knight, often in a public ceremony. His knight master or lord said words like these: "In the name of God, Saint Michael, and Saint George, I dub thee knight; be brave and loyal." Then the young knight took his place beside other warriors.

Knights usually fought on horseback using swords, axes, and lances, which were long poles. They wore armor and carried shields for protection. Other soldiers fought on foot using daggers, spears, crossbows, and longbows. In addition to actual warfare, knights engaged in mock battles called **tournaments**.

Castles and Defense During the early Middle Ages, powerful lords fortified their homes to withstand attack. The strongholds gradually became larger and grander. By the 1100s, monarchs and nobles owned sprawling stone castles with high walls, towers, and drawbridges over wide moats. They were not merely homes for the lords; they were also fortresses. The knights who defended the castle also lived there. In time of war, the peasants in the nearby villages would take refuge within the castle walls. Wars often centered on seizing castles that commanded strategic river crossings, harbors, or mountain passes.

History Interactive
For: An interactive activity
Web Code: nap-0721

Hooks and Ladders
The castle's defenders used poles with hooks to push away attackers' ladders. They also showered the enemy with hot oil and flaming arrows.

Siege Tower
If attackers could span the moat, they would roll this huge tower up to the castle walls. Then they faced hand-to-hand combat at the top.

Thinking Critically

- Express Problems Clearly** What were some of the drawbacks of using a castle for defense?
- Draw Inferences** What technologies developed in response to castle defenses?

BIOGRAPHY

Eleanor of Aquitaine

Eleanor (1122–1204), daughter of the Duke of Aquitaine, inherited her father's lands when he died in 1137. When she was only 15, she married the heir to the French throne. Eleanor had considerable influence over her husband, King Louis VII, and even accompanied him on the Second Crusade, wearing armor and riding on horseback alongside male crusaders.

When Louis ended his marriage to Eleanor, she regained control of Aquitaine. In 1152, she married another king, Henry II of England, and again became active in politics. In 1173, Eleanor aided several of her sons in an attempt to overthrow Henry. When the revolt failed, Henry had Eleanor imprisoned. After Henry died, her son Richard (known as "the Lion-Heart") became king of England. Richard freed his mother, and she later ruled in his place while he went on a crusade to the Holy

Land. **How did Eleanor expand the usual role of medieval women?**



Noblewomen: Restrictions and Power Noblewomen played active roles in this warrior society. While her husband or father was off fighting, the "lady of the manor" took over his duties. She supervised vassals, managed the household, and performed necessary agricultural and medical tasks. Sometimes she might even have to go to war to defend her estate. A few medieval noblewomen took a hand in politics. For example, Eleanor of Aquitaine was a leading force in European politics for more than 50 years.

Women's rights to inheritance were restricted under the feudal system, although women did sometimes inherit fiefs. Land usually passed to the eldest son in a family. A woman frequently received land as part of her dowry, and fierce marriage negotiations swirled around an unmarried or widowed heiress. A widow retained her land.

Like their brothers, the daughters of nobles were sent to friends or relatives for training. Before her parents arranged her marriage, a young woman was expected to know how to spin and weave and how to supervise servants. A few learned to read and write. In her role as wife, a noblewoman was expected to bear many children and be dutiful to her husband.

Chivalry: Romance and Reality In the later Middle Ages, knights adopted a code of conduct called **chivalry**. Chivalry required knights to be brave, loyal, and true to their word. In warfare, they had to fight fairly. For example, a knight agreed not to attack

another knight before the opponent had a chance to put on his armor. Warriors also had to treat a captured knight well or even release him if he promised to pay his ransom. Chivalry had limits, though. Its elaborate rules applied to nobles only, not to commoners.

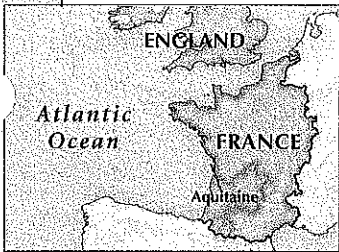
But chivalry also dictated that knights protect the weak, and that included both peasants and noblewomen. In theory, if not always in practice, chivalry placed women on a pedestal. **Troubadours**, or wandering musicians, sang about the brave deeds of knights and their devotion to their lady loves. Their songs became the basis for epic stories and poems. Few real knights could live up to the ideals of chivalry, but they did provide a standard against which a knight's behavior could be measured.

✓ **Checkpoint** How was warfare central to life in the Middle Ages?

Manors Support Feudalism

The heart of the feudal economy was the **manor**, or lord's estate. Most manors included one or more villages and the surrounding lands. Peasants, who made up the majority of the population in medieval society, lived and worked on the manor.

Most peasants on a manor were **serfs**, bound to the land. Serfs were not slaves who could be bought and sold. Still, they were not free. They could not leave the manor without the lord's permission. If the manor was granted to a new lord, the serfs went along with it.



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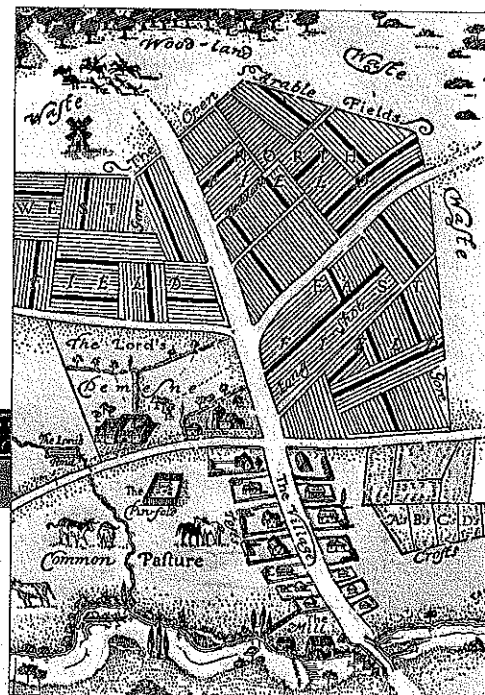
Lords and Peasants: Mutual Obligations Peasants and their lords were tied together by mutual rights and obligations. Peasants had to work several days a week farming the lord's lands. They also repaired his roads, bridges, and fences. Peasants had to ask the lord's permission to marry. Peasants paid the lord a fee when they inherited their father's acres or when they used the local mill to grind grain. Other payments fell due at Christmas and Easter. Peasants had little opportunity to use money, so they paid with products such as grain, honey, eggs, or chickens.

In return for their labor and other payments, peasants had the right to farm some land for themselves. They were also entitled to their lord's protection from raids or warfare. Although they could not leave the manor freely, they also could not be forced off it. In theory, at least, they were guaranteed food, housing, and land. This system supported the nobility, making feudalism possible.

A Self-Sufficient World During the early Middle Ages, the manor was generally self-sufficient. That is, the peasants who lived there produced almost everything they needed, from food and clothing to simple furniture and tools. Most peasants never ventured more than a few miles from their village. They had no schooling and no knowledge of a larger world outside.

A typical manor included cottages and huts clustered close together in a village. Nearby stood a water mill to grind grain, a church, and the lord's manor house. The fields surrounding the village were divided into narrow strips. Each family had strips of land in different fields so that good land and bad land were shared evenly.

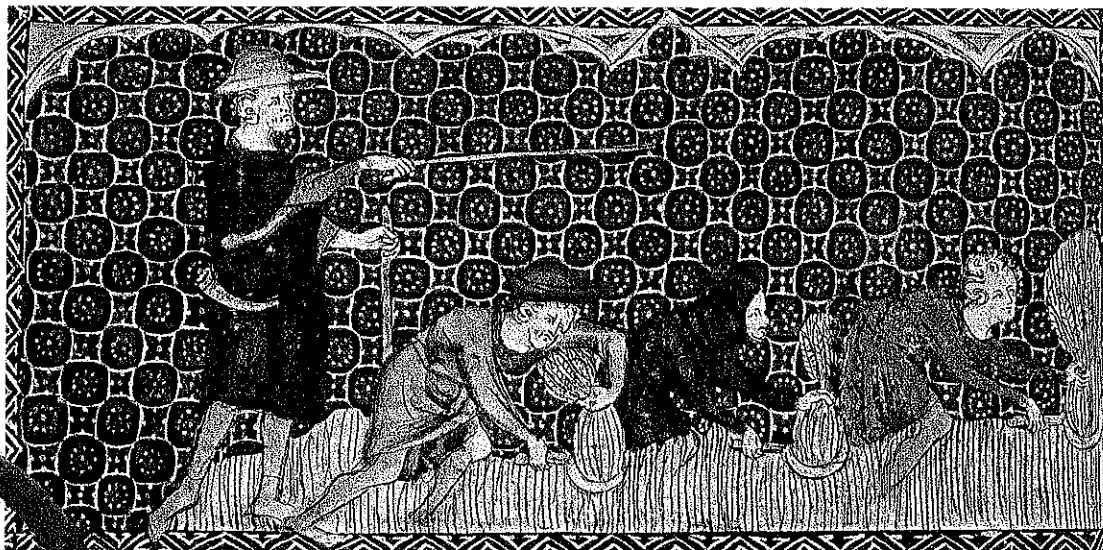
Beyond the fields for growing crops, there were pastures for animals and meadows that provided hay. The forests that lay beyond the cleared land—and all the animals in them—were usually reserved for the use of the lord.



Life on the Manor

The lord of the manor and his family lived in relative luxury. As the illustration below shows, nobles had a variety of foods and were waited on by servants when they dined. Notice the lord's home, or demesne, in the medieval diagram at the right and compare it with the village homes of the peasants who worked his land.





Back-Breaking Labor

These peasants use sickles to harvest grain under the watchful eye—and cane—of the lord's official. A medieval sickle is shown above (right) along with a billhook for maintaining hedges. *What does the illustration suggest about peasant life?*

Peasant Life For most peasants, life was harsh. Men, women, and children worked long hours, from sunup to sundown. During planting season, a man might guide an ox-drawn plow through the fields while his wife walked alongside, urging the ox on with a pointed stick. Children helped in the fields, planting seeds, weeding, and taking care of pigs or sheep. In late winter, when the harvest was gone and new crops had not yet ripened, hunger was common. Disease took a heavy toll, and few peasants lived beyond the age of 35.

The peasant family ate a simple diet of black bread with vegetables such as cabbage, turnips, or onions. They seldom had meat—that was reserved for the lord. Peasants who poached, or illegally killed wild game on their lord's manor, risked harsh punishment. If they lived near a river, peasants might add fish to their diet. At night, the family and their livestock—cows, chickens, pigs, or sheep—slept together in their hut.

Still, peasants found occasions to celebrate, such as marriages and births. Welcome breaks came at Christmas and Easter, when peasants had a week off from work. At these times, people might butcher an animal for a feast. There would also be dancing and rough sports, from wrestling to ball games.

Checkpoint How did the manor system work?

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice
Web Code: naa-0721

Assessment

Terms, People, and Places

1. For each term, person, or place listed at the beginning of the section, write a sentence explaining its significance.

Note Taking

2. **Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas**
Use your completed flowchart to answer the Focus Question: How did feudalism and the manor economy emerge and shape medieval life?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

3. **Analyze Information** How did a lord benefit from giving his lands away as fiefs?
4. **Make Comparisons** Compare the rights and obligations of noblemen and noblewomen during the Middle Ages.
5. **Draw Conclusions** How did the manor serve the needs of the early Middle Ages?

Writing About History

Quick Write: Develop a Thesis and Choose Supporting Information

Choose a group discussed in this section. Write a sentence expressing your view of this group's place in medieval society. Jot down some information to support your statement. Revise this working thesis as you learn more. For example, you might begin with this thesis:

Peasants did most of the work but derived few benefits from the manor system.