

Document Packet: "Feudalism"

Questions :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why does the author describe the time that he is writing about as the "night of the ninth century?" ▪ According to his account, why did feudalism, as a political system, prove necessary or useful to European society?
Document #1	
<p>The night of the ninth century... What is its course? Dimly the records give a glimpse of a people scattered and without guidance. The Barbarians have broken through the ramparts. The Saracen invasions have spread in successive waves over the South. The Hungarians swarm over the Eastern provinces. "These strangers," writes Richer, "gave themselves over to the most cruel outrages; they sacked town and village, and laid waste the fields. They burned down the churches and then departed with a crowd of captives and no one said them nay. The Normans from the north penetrate by way of the rivers to the very center of France, "skimming over the ocean like pirates." Chartres, in the very heart of the realm, was wont to take pride in its name, "the city of stone," ... The Normans appear, and Chartres is sacked. William le Breton boasts the antiquity and wealth of the town of Autun; but the Barbarians have scattered these riches and its site is overgrown with weeds. "The country is laid waste as far as the Lone," says the chronicler of Amboise, so completely that where once were prosperous towns, wild animals now roam</p> <p>And Paris? "What shall I say of her?" writes Adrevald. "That town once resplendent in her wealth and glory, famed for her fertile lands, is now but a heap of ashes." In the course of the ninth and tenth centuries all the towns of France were destroyed. Can one imagine the slaughter and plunder concentrated in such a statement? In the little country villages the houses crumble to dust. Powerless to resist the invaders, many men-at-arms join them. They plunder together, and as there is no longer any supreme authority, private quarrels, of man against man, family against family, of district against district, break out, are multiplied, and never-ending. "And three men cannot meet two without putting them to death." "The statutes of the sacred canons (laws) . . . have become void," writes Carloman in his palace (March 884). Private wars become common. "In the absence of a central authority," says Hariulf, "the stronger break out into violence." "Men destroy one another like the fishes of the sea".... There is no longer any trade, only unceasing terror. Fearful men put up buildings of wood only. Architecture is no more...</p> <p>The ties which united the inhabitants of the country have been burst asunder; customary and legal usage have broken down. Society has no longer any governance.</p>	
<p>SECONDARY SOURCE: Frantz Funck-Brentano, <i>The Middle Ages</i>. Translated by E. O'Neill. London. Reinemann, 1922, 1-3.</p>	

Questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why is it important to clarify definitions before discussing or debating topics? ▪ According to this information, why has it been difficult to agree on a definition of "feudalism?"
Document #2	
<p>The term feudal has a curious and complicated history. All the Germanic languages had a word for cattle. As cattle were the only moveable goods of any importance among the early Germans, these words soon took the wider meaning of chattels. The Gallo-Roman language of the West Frankish state adopted such a term from the Franks and made it into "fie" or "fief." In the tenth century we find it used for arms, clothing, horses, and food. The man of wealth who kept a warrior in his household supplied him with these things. Hence when he decided to give the warrior land to support him . . . some called this land a fief. .</p> <p>"Fief" became "feudum" in Latin. In the seventeenth century "feodale" and "feudal" appear in France and England respectively as legal terms to refer to anything connected with fiefs and fief-holders-the medieval nobles and their lands. In 'the eighteenth century the meaning of these words was extended to cover the relations between the fief-holder and the non-noble peasants who tilled his fief. This usage appears in full force in 1789 in the famous decree of the National Assembly abolishing the "regime feodale."</p> <p>Today feudalism is used in these two senses and at least one other. Medieval historians in both England and the United States remain faithful to its restricted meaning-a system of fiefs and holders of fiefs . . . But continental historians frequently use it in the broader sense to cover all the political and social institutions of rural society. To them feudal society includes both knights and peasants... Finally, many modern writers have an inclination to use "feudal" to describe anything which seems to them backward. I have read in the <i>Baltimore Sun</i> that the Eastern Shore is feudal.</p>	
<p>SECONDARY SOURCE: Sidney Painter, <i>Feudalism & Liberty</i>. F. A. Cazal, ed. Baltimore. The John Hopkins Press, 1961, 3-6.</p>	

Questions :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why did people look to be vassals to lords such as the one mentioned below? ▪ How did the lord and his vassal depend on one another?
Document #3	
<p>To that magnificent lord _____ Since it is known . . . to all how little I have whence to feed and clothe myself, I have therefore petitioned your piety, and your good-will had decreed to me that I should hand myself over or commend myself to your guardianship, which I have thereupon done; that is to say in this way, that you should aid and succor me as well with food as with clothing, according as I shall be able to serve you and deserve it. And so long as I live I ought to provide service and honor to you, suitably to my free condition; and I shall not during the time of my life have the ability to withdraw from your power or guardianship; but must remain during the days of my life under your power or defense. Wherefore it is proper that if either of us shall wish to withdraw himself from these agreements, he shall pay _____ shillings to the other party . . . otherwise this agreement shall remain unbroken.</p>	
<p>SOURCE: <i>Translation and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History</i>. Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1897 [?], IV, No.3 (E. P. Cheyney, ed.), 3-4.</p>	

Questions :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What were the six things that a faithful vassal should have always kept in mind? ▪ What was a vassal expected to do besides avoid injurious behavior? ▪ Why might a vassal have more responsibilities and a lord much less?
Document #4	
<p>To William, most illustrious duke of the Aquitanians; Bishop Fulbert, the favor of his prayers:</p> <p>Requested to write something regarding the character of fealty, I have set down briefly for you, on the authority of the books, the following things. He who takes the oath of fealty [faithfulness] to his lord ought always to keep in mind these six things: what is harmless, safe, honorable, useful, easy, and practicable. Harmless, which means that he ought not to injure his lord in his body; safe, that he should not injure him by betraying his confidence or the defenses upon which he depends for security; honorable, that he should not injure him in his justice, or in other matters that relate to his honor; useful, that he should not injure him in his property; easy, that he should not make difficult that which his lord can do easily; and practicable, that he should not make impossible for the lord that which is possible.</p> <p>However, while it is proper that the faithful vassal avoid these injuries, it is not for doing this alone that he deserves his holding: for it is not enough to refrain from wrongdoing, unless that which is good is done also. It remains, therefore, that in the same six things referred to above he should faithfully advise and aid his lord, if he wishes' to be regarded as worthy of his benefice and to be safe concerning the fealty which he has sworn.</p> <p>The lord also ought to act toward his faithful vassal in the same manner in all these things. And if he fails to do this, he will be rightfully regarded as guilty of bad faith, just as the former, if he should be found shirking, or willing to shirk, his obligations would be perfidious [treacherous] and perjured.</p> <p>I should have written to you at greater length had I not been busy with many other matters, including the rebuilding of our city and church, which were recently completely destroyed by a terrible fire. Though for a time we could not think of anything but this disaster, yet now, by the hope of Gods comfort, and of yours also, we breathe more freely again.</p>	
<p>SOURCE: F.A. Ogg, ecL, <i>A Source Book of Medieval History</i> (New York: American Book Company, 1907), 220-221. Reprinted in David Herlihy, ed., <i>The History of Feudalism</i>. (New York: Walker and Company, 1970), 97.</p>	

Question:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How did the laws limit the power of a prince/lord? ▪ What legal restrictions are placed on a liegeman [vassal] of a lord?
Document #5	
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<p>4. How the prince cannot punish any baron or vassal of his without the consent of his liegemen. The Prince cannot punish any baron or vassal of his, either in civil or criminal action, nor injure him, nor place a penalty on him, without the counsel and consent of his liegemen or of the major part of them; nor render a decision concerning someone's fief or commission others to decide his actions at law; but he must render a decision through his liegemen. . . .</p> <p>5. How no liegeman can be held by his lord except for two causes. It has been ordered in the said Usages that no liegeman of the Principality can be detained in person by his lord for any reason except these two, to wit: for the causes of homicide and treason. And it is thus because his fief provides his security.</p>	

6. What should be done if a liegeman commits homicide or treason? If it should happen that a liegeman has committed homicide or treason, what should be done? To this the answer is, that according to the customs and usages aforesaid the lord cannot punish or detain him unless the homicide or treason has first been proved and unless the judgment has been made in the case of the said liegeman by the other liegemen of the Principality. . . .

23. By the Usage and Custom of the Empire of Romania, the Prince cannot place upon his vassals or freemen, or even on their serfs, any tallages [i.e., taxes] or collections on any condition or under any name whatever, or anything, for the utility of the country, without the counsel and consent as well of the liegemen and vassals as of the other freemen. . . .

25. How only the Prince can maintain and make free a serf. Only the Seignior, that is the Prince, can maintain and make free his serf or that of another, with the consent of the lord of the serf. And the Seignior can give a fief to the Church or part of a fief, or even a serf. But if the donation is made by someone else, it shall be valid only during the lifetime of the donor. . . .

28. When the Prince makes war on one of his barons, what should the vassals of this baron do? If the Prince makes war on one of his barons or vassals, the vassals of that baron or vassal are held to defend their lord if the Prince has unjustly begun the war.

32. How fiefs and baronies are inherited by primogeniture [law of the first-born]. In truth, in a fief, a barony, or in the Principality the first-born succeeds the father or the mother and if there is no son or daughter, the nearest relative who appears in the Principality succeeds, if he is of the line from which the paternal or maternal fief proceeds. . . .

151. If a liegeman kills a serf, what should be done? If it happens that a liegeman should kill a serf by misadventure, he is required to give the latter's lord another serf worth as much as the victim. But if he acted on premeditation, he shall submit to the sentence of the liegemen of the lord at the place where the homicide was committed, if the lord of the place has jurisdiction in criminal matters. . . .

161. How in killing someone in self-defense, one does not merit a penalty. The vassal, or whoever it may be, [who] in defending himself will kill someone, does not for this merit any penalty. . . .

167. When a person deserts his lord in battle and flees before the battle has been lost, he deserves to be disinherited of his land by judgment of the court of his lord. And if a man kills another man and is taken, and is punished with death by the court, he does not lose his [movable] goods but can freely dispose of his goods by will, unless he is a traitor.

SOURCE: Excerpt from *Feudal Institutions as Revealed in the Assizes of Romania*, translated by Peter W. Topping (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949).

Document Packet: "Manorialism"

Document #1

Historians agree that the decline of the money economy in the late Roman Empire gave rise to *manorialism* and that the revival of a money economy caused its demise (decline) . . . under the manorial system a landed aristocracy controlled most of the land along with the economic, political, and legal privileges that came with such authority. The mass of the inhabitants of early medieval Europe were un-free peasants, tightly bound to the soil and to their lord's will. Though students of manorialism have long been careful to make a distinction between manorialism and feudalism, the systems are often confused and are lumped together under the term feudalism. Feudalism . . . was the political and military system which came into practice some four centuries after manorialism and which was superimposed (added to/laid over) upon it. All the men involved in feudalism were free and were generally aristocrats bound to each other by highly honorable and mutual obligations. The feudal knight followed the honorable profession of fighting; the peasant followed the unhonorable occupation of working the soil so that his master could eat.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Bryce Lyon, *The Middle Ages in Recent Historical Thought*, 8.

Document #2

The manor contained some forest, some land used for pasture and haying, and some cultivated land. Part of the cultivated land was reserved for the use of the lord, and the rest of it was divided among the peasants.

The cultivated land of the manor was divided into hundreds of small strips, usually an acre or half an acre in size. Each peasant was assigned a number of small strips scattered over the manor. This method of dividing the land gave each peasant a portion both of the good land and the poor, but it cost him much time in going from one bit of land to another. Other farming practices were equally inefficient. The use of fertilizer and crop rotation was not understood. Each season all the cultivated land on the manor was divided into three fields, one being sown to winter crops such as wheat or rye, one to spring crops such as oats or barley, and the third being left idle that year so that it might recover its fertility. The crops yielded little even in good years. Farm animals were small and unproductive because of poor care and poor breeding. Farm implements were few and clumsy....

Medieval peasants lived in villages, which were built near the castle if the manor had one. The small thatch-roofed, one-roomed houses were grouped about an open space (the "green"), or on both sides of a single narrow street. The important buildings were the parish church, a mill, and possibly a blacksmith's shop. The population of a village might be from about one hundred to several hundred persons.

SOURCE: *Feudal Institutions as Revealed in the Assizes of Romania*. Translated by Peter W. Topping. University of Pennsylvania, 1949, 92.

Document #3

Rural Poverty

"I have no penny," quoth Piers, "pullets {chicken feed} for to buy,
Neither geese nor young pigs, but two green cheeses,
A few curds and cream and an oaten cake,
And two loaves of beans and bran baked for my children.
And yet I say, by my soul I have no salt bacon,
Nor any eggs, by Christ, collops {a small slice of meat} for to make.
But I have parsley and leeks, and many cabbage plants,
And also a cow and a calf, and a cart mare too
To draw afield the dung while the drought lasts.
And by these means we must make do until Lammas tide.
And by then, I hope, to have harvest in my croft,
And then may I dress your dinner, as dearly I wish."
All the poor people then fetched their peascods,
Beans and baked apples they brought in their laps,
Chibolles {greens} and chevrils and many ripe cherries,
And proffered Piers this present wherewith to please Hunger.
Then poor folk for fear fed Hunger eagerly
With green leeks and peas to poison Hunger they thought.
Until, when it neared harvest new corn came to market.
Then folks became fain and fed Hunger with the best,
With good ale, as Glutton taught, and made Hunger to sleep.
Then would Waster not work but wandered about,
Nor no beggar eat bread that had beans within
But craved the best of white bread, or at least of clean white.
And no halfpenny ale in no wise would he drink
But the best and the brownest for sale in the borough.
Laborers that have no land to live on but their hands
Deign not to dine today on worts a night old.
No penny ale may please them, and no piece of bacon,
Unless it be fresh flesh or fish fried or baked,
And that hot or hotter against chilling of their maw.
And if he be not dearly hired, then will he ,
chide,
And wail the time that he became a workman.

The Peasant's Cottage

Three things there are that make a man by their strength
To flee his own house, as Holy Writ {law} shows.
The one is a wicked wife who will not be corrected,
Her husband flees from her, for fear of her tongue.
And if his house be unroofed and rain falls on his bed,
He seeks and he seeks until he sleeps dry.
And when smoke and smoldering smite in his sight,
It does him worse than his wife or wet to sleep.
For smoke and smoldering smite in his eyes,
Until he is blear-eyed or blind, and hoarse in the throat,
Coughing and cursing that Christ gives them sorrow,
Who should bring better wood, or blow till it burns.

The Peasant's Cares

The most needy are our neighbors, if we notice right well,
As prisoners in pits and poor folk in cottages,
Charged with their children, and chief lords rent,
What by spinning they save, they spend it in house-hire,
Both in milk and in meal to make a mess of porridge.
To cheer up their children who chafe for their food,
And they themselves suffer surely much hunger
And woe in the winter, with waking at nights
And rising to rock an oft restless cradle,
Both to card and to comb, to clout and to wash,
To rub and to reel year, rushes to peel,
So 'tis pity to proclaim or in poetry to show
The woe of these women who work in such cottages;
And of many other men who much woe suffer,
Cripples with hunger and with thirst, they keep up appearances,
And are abashed for to beg, and will not be blazoned
What they need from their neighbors, at noon and at evensong.
This I know full well, for the world has taught me,
How churls are afflicted who have many children,
And have no coin but their craft to clothe and to keep them,
And fill many to feed and few pence to do it.
With bread and penny-ale that is less than a pittance,
Cold flesh and cold fish, instead of roast venison;
And on Fridays and feast days a farthing's worth of mussels
Would be a feast for such folk, or else a few cockles,
'Twere a charity to help those that bear such charges,
And comfort such cottagers, the cripples and blind.

SOURCE: Excerpts from the English poem, *Piers Plowman*, written by a London priest, William Langland in 1362.

Document #4

How did the three-field system work, as compared with the older . . . two-field rotation? Under the two-field plan, about half the land was planted with winter grain while the other half was left fallow. The next year the two fields simply exchanged functions.

Under the three-field plan, the arable land was divided roughly into thirds. One section was planted in the autumn with winter wheat or rye. The following spring, the second field was planted with oats, barley, peas, chickpeas, lentils, or broad beans. The third field was left fallow. The next year the first field was planted to summer crops; the second field was left fallow; the third field was put to winter grains.

In the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries there were only three plowings for the entire three-year cycle: winter field in October or November; summer field in March or whenever the ground was beginning to warm.; fallow towards the end of June. Thus in this earlier period a manor of 600 acres under the two-field system would plow 600 acres for 300 acres in crops, whereas the same 600 acres under the three-field system would have 400 acres under crops for the same plowing, or an increase of one-third.

By the twelfth century at the latest, it had been found profitable both in the two- and three-field systems to plow the fallow twice in order to keep down weeds and to improve fertility. This change increased the advantage of the triennial rotation even further. Peasants handling 600 acres under the two-field plan, and plowing the fallow twice, would plow annually $300 + 600 = 900$ acres for 300 in crops. Managing 600 acres on the three-field system, again with double plowing of the fallow, they would plow annually only $200 + 200 + 400 = 800$ acres for 400 acres in crops. In terms of 600 acres, the increase of production in adopting the new rotation would still be only one-third. But since the change involved 100 acres less of annual plowing, 75 acres (plowed as $25 + 25 = 50$) might be added without additional labor, if such land could be secured by reclamation. The same peasants would thus be cultivating not 600 but 675 acres (450 in crops), and their production advantage over the two-field rotation would be 50%. The spread of the triennial system thus gave a major impulse to clearing land: forests fell; swamps were drained; dikes stole polders (pieces of dry land) from the sea.

The new plan of rotation, then, had several advantages. First, as has just been said, it increased the area which a peasant could cultivate by one-eighth and it pushed up his productivity by one-half. Second, the new plan distributed the labor of plowing, sowing and harvesting more evenly over the year, and thus increased efficiency. Third, it much reduced the chance of famine by diversifying crops and subjecting them to different conditions of germination, growth, and harvest. But fourth, and perhaps most important, the spring planting, which was the essence of the new rotation, stepped up the production of certain crops which had particular significance.

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One of the significant crops Professor White is referring to in his last sentence is oats for horses. Elsewhere in his book, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, White explains why oats and horses were so important. In ancient times, most of the heavy plowing work on farms was done by oxen. Plodding oxen are much slower and less efficient than horses provided that horses can be harnessed to a plow in a way which allows them to make full use of their pulling power. The ancients failed to develop a proper horse collar. In ancient times, the harder the horse pulled, the more the collar pressed against its upper chest and windpipe, cutting down on its oxygen supply. Put simply; in ancient times plow horses could not pull hard and breathe deeply at the same time.

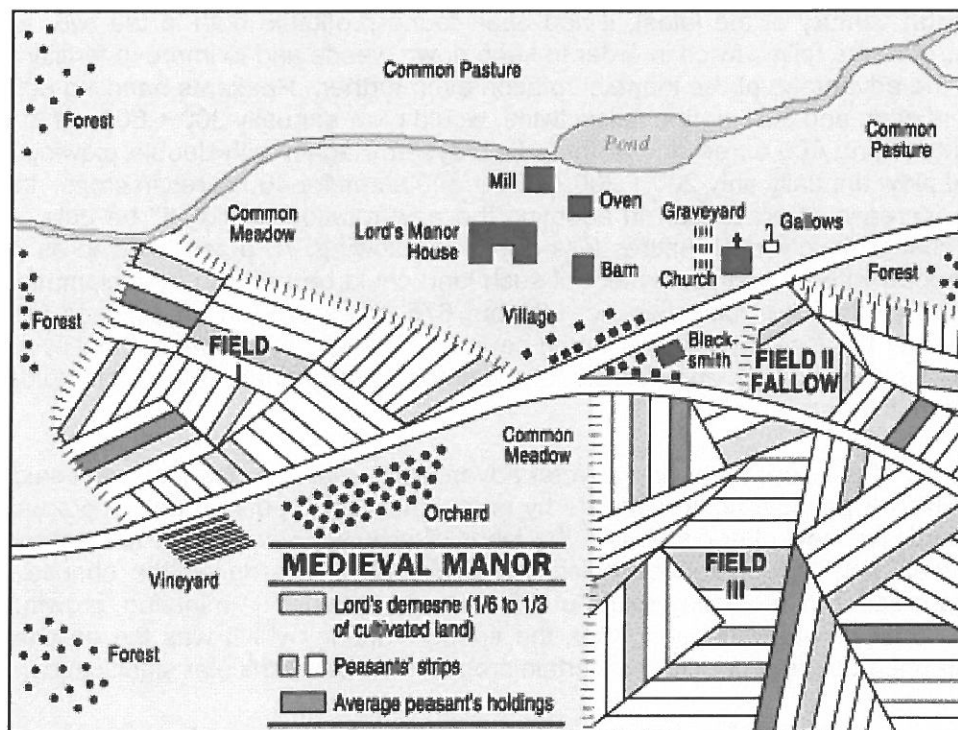
One of the most important inventions of the Middle Ages was a new style horse collar. It fit over

the horse's shoulders. When the animal pulled a heavy plow, the collar did not press against its chest and windpipe. The new horse collar was a big part of the medieval revolution in agriculture. Another medieval innovation was a new type of plow, the cutting edge of which turned the earth more easily and efficiently. All over Europe, when oxen were replaced by horses, when the three-field system replaced the two-field system, and when the improved plow came into general use, agricultural productivity shot up and starvation was greatly reduced. This enabled new towns to spring up and old ones to grow much larger.

In these towns, other technological advances occurred which took the Middle Ages far beyond the ancients. Upon the humble but firm foundation of an innovative agriculture, the civilization of the High Middle Ages was built.

SECONDARY SOURCE: "The Three-Field System," an excerpt from *Medieval Technology and Social Change* by Lynn White, Jr.

Document #5



Document #6

A reading of most secondary texts leads to the conclusion that many teachers are still explaining manorialism upon the basis of what was known and said around the middle of the nineteenth century. The classic and now trite (used too much) description of the peasant village with its three-field system is all too familiar. What is not familiar to enough teachers is the new picture of manorialism that has been emerging during the past half century. From the utilization of new records, from an increased knowledge of medieval technology, from intensive topographical and cartographical study, from aerial photography, from place-name study, and from the application of sociological and anthropological methods has arisen a new concept of manorialism. . The system prevailing in much of northern Europe consisted of a nucleated village (a concentration of huts for the peasants) encircled by the arable fields in which were scattered the strips of the peasants. Another arrangement found in the poorer parts of France, England, and the Mediterranean area was the hamlet system. This consisted of a compact farm cultivated by one peasant and his family who customarily lived in an isolated house on the land. When the land became exhausted, other land was appropriated and cultivated; this . . . technique is known as "in-field" and "out-field" exploitation .One can still justifiably teach that Europe was characterized by the three- and two-field systems with field rotation and cooperative labor, that fields were open, and that the classic nucleated village prevailed in northwestern Europe. But within the framework of this generalization one must acknowledge the large number of field variations and the untypical villages and hamlets.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Bryce Lyon, *The Middle Ages in Recent Historical Thought*, 7-9.

