

Feudalism and Manorialism Document Packet

Read these documents, answer the questions associated with each document, and be prepared to participate in a Socratic seminar on Wednesday. Our Socratic seminar will focus mainly on the following question: *Did feudalism bring about stability in Medieval Europe or was it a political and social disaster?* You will need to be able to voice an opinion about this question and other aspects of feudalism and manorialism and support your opinion with information from the documents.

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 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 #2	
<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 [?1, 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 #3	
<p>To William, most illustrious duke of the Aquitanians; Bishop Fulbert, the favor of his prayers: 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. 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. 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. 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>	

Questions for Documents 4 and 5

1. What is a medieval manor? How did the manor system [manorialism] work?
2. How was manorialism different from feudalism?
3. What relationship did the serf have to the land -- economically? legally?
4. What power did the nobility have over their serfs/peasants?
5. Why were peasants and serfs so willing to put up with these hardships?
6. According to historian, Lyon, how have other historians erred in their description of manorial life?

Document #4

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 #5

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*

Questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ Is the author's conclusion that "no price was too high when the future of Europe was at stake" an historical conclusion (Does the author's position as an historian make this conclusion more valid?) ⌚ Is it the job of the historian to make such judgments? Why or why not?
Document #6	
<p>In the midst of all the treason and selfishness, the wars, murders, and rebellions of the dismal age . . . there is one thought only that can afford the student any consolation. After the break-up of the empire of Charles the Great, while Dane, Saracen, Hungarian, and Slave were simultaneously besetting(attacking) the gates of Christendom, there was a very serious danger that the fabric of civilized Europe might crumble to pieces beneath their blows. That it did not do so must be attributed to the unexpected powers of resistance developed . . . under the feudal system. Disastrous as were most of the effects of that system, it at least justified its existence by saving Christendom from the foe without. What the successors of Charles the Great had failed to do when all the military force of the empire was at their backs was accomplished by the petty counts and margraves whose power was developed on the ruins of the central authority. It was the armed feudal horseman, and the impregnable walls of the feudal castle that foiled the attacks of the Dane, the Saracen, and the Hungarian....Europe lapsed, indeed, into utter decentralization. . . It was not without justice that the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries have been called 'the Dark Ages' .the remains of the old Teutonic(German) liberty finally disappear as feudalism is perfected, and the freeman becomes everywhere the vassal of some greater or smaller lord. But all the details of this unhappy change must not blind us to the fact that Christendom was saved from destruction by the men of the feudal age. . .The military triumph was a political disaster. At a moment when the kingly power was shaken by the unhappy civil wars of the descendants of Charles the Great, when almost every province was disputed . . . it was absolutely fatal that the control of the warlike strength of Europe should pass into(the hands of . . . petty magnates(nobles) . . . that price at which Christendom bought its safety was enormous: nevertheless no price was too high when the future of Europe was at stake. Any ransom was worth paying, if thereby Rome was saved from the Saracen, Mainz from the Magyar.. Paris from the heathen of the North.</p>	
SECONDARY SOURCE: Charles Oman, <i>The Dark Ages</i> . London Rivingtons Brothers Limited 1923, 511-14.	

Question:	⌚ Why does the author feel that as a political system, feudalism failed to bring order to Western Europe?
Document #7	
<p>The feudal relationship was essentially a contract between lord and vassals which was defined and enforced by mutual agreement . . . It was assumed that lord and vassals had a common interest - the welfare of the fief. No lord was expected to make a serious decision, such as choosing a wife or going to war, without asking counsel of his vassals. As a political system pure feudalism was little removed from anarchy. It assumed a more-or-less permanent state of war. While it provided machinery for the peaceful settling of most disputes, it did not <i>compel</i> men to settle their disputes peacefully. Thus if two knights quarreled, they could always find a feudal court competent to hear the case, but if they preferred to wage war on each other, and they usually did, feudal custom did not hinder them. France in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, and parts of Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth, are prime examples of feudalism uncontrolled by public authority. In England from the beginning, in France after 1150A. D.... royal authority based on the traditions of Germanic monarchy, mingled vaguely with those of Imperial Rome(laws), curbed feudal anarchy to some extent.</p>	
SECONDARY SOURCE: Sidney Painter, <i>Feudalism and Liberty</i> , pg. 7.	

Questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌚ How does Bryce Lyon view Painter's interpretation of feudalism and its effects on European politics? ⌚ Why does he disagree with historians that contend that feudalism created political disorder in Europe?
Document #8	
<p>It is . . . [the works] of [Carl] Stephenson and Sidney Painter that best describe how feudalism provided a form of government for western Europe. They have shown feudalism as a useful and constructive political system. They believe that feudalism, rather than being a destructive political force breeding particularism [disunity] and anarchy, was a constructive and unifying system that made possible the political rehabilitation of western Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and that provided the conditions necessary for the formation of the strong centralized states that were England, France, Normandy and Flanders. Feudalism was the only military and political system possible in the eighth century. It provided the Carolingian rulers and their successors with the essential military and political services and was not responsible, as many historians have asserted, for the pulling-apart of the Carolingian Empire. That uncertain structure was doomed to failure by its size. . . Feudalism could operate effectively only within a small area. In a country like Flanders or in a compact kingdom like England the feudal rulers could make feudalism work. They could maintain the personal bond of loyalty inherent in vassalage and could force their vassals to perform feudal obligations .Scholarly opinion, it should be noted, now supports this thesis, that feudalism was a constructive and unifying political force. It is inaccurate to teach feudalism as an anarchical political system that contributed to the darkness of the early Middle Ages.</p>	
<p>SECONDARY SOURCE: Bryce Lyon, <i>The Middle Ages in Recent Historical Thought</i>. Center for Teachers of Hist American Historical Association, Washington, D.C. 1959, 15.</p>	

Preparing for a Socratic seminar --

1. Your thoughts about feudalism and monarialism could begin with one of the following:
I think that..... I agree / disagree with.... I feel that I wonder if..... ? Why ...?
Suppose that?

2. You will need to have specific arguments/evidence from the documents to support (back up) your opinion.