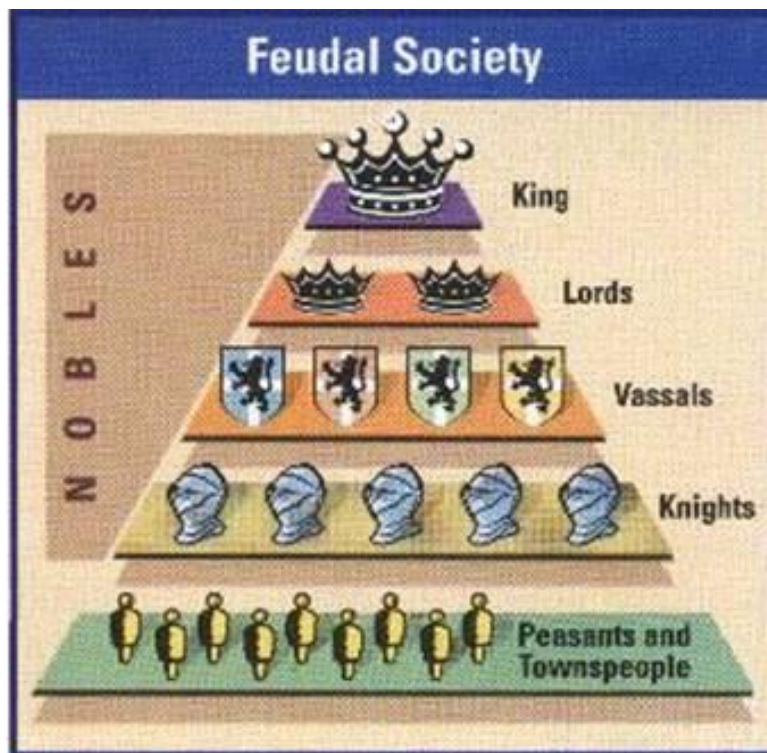


## Feudal Society in Western Europe

Kings during the Middle Ages in Western Europe did not command a strong central government like that of the Roman emperors. Instead, kings granted land, or *fiefs*, in exchange for loyalty and military service. Those who received a fief were called *vassals*. Each vassal who was given land by the king had to agree to give the king a certain number of armed men each year for his service. These men were called *knights*. A knight was a trained warrior who fought on horseback with swords and lances during the Middle Ages.

A vassal who promised knights to the king acquired the knights by giving them parts of his own fief. When a vassal gave land to others, he became a *lord*. The person who received the land became his vassal. These vassals, in turn, would grant parts of their fiefs to still others. Therefore many of the king's vassals became lords of their own vassals.

This form of government that developed in Western Europe during the Middle Ages was called *feudalism*. It was a system of government, a way of life, and a distinctive kind of society.



Feudal governments provided a way to settle disputes. Aside from that and providing military protection, they did little else. They did not provide schools, hospitals, fire protection, or other services that governments provide today.

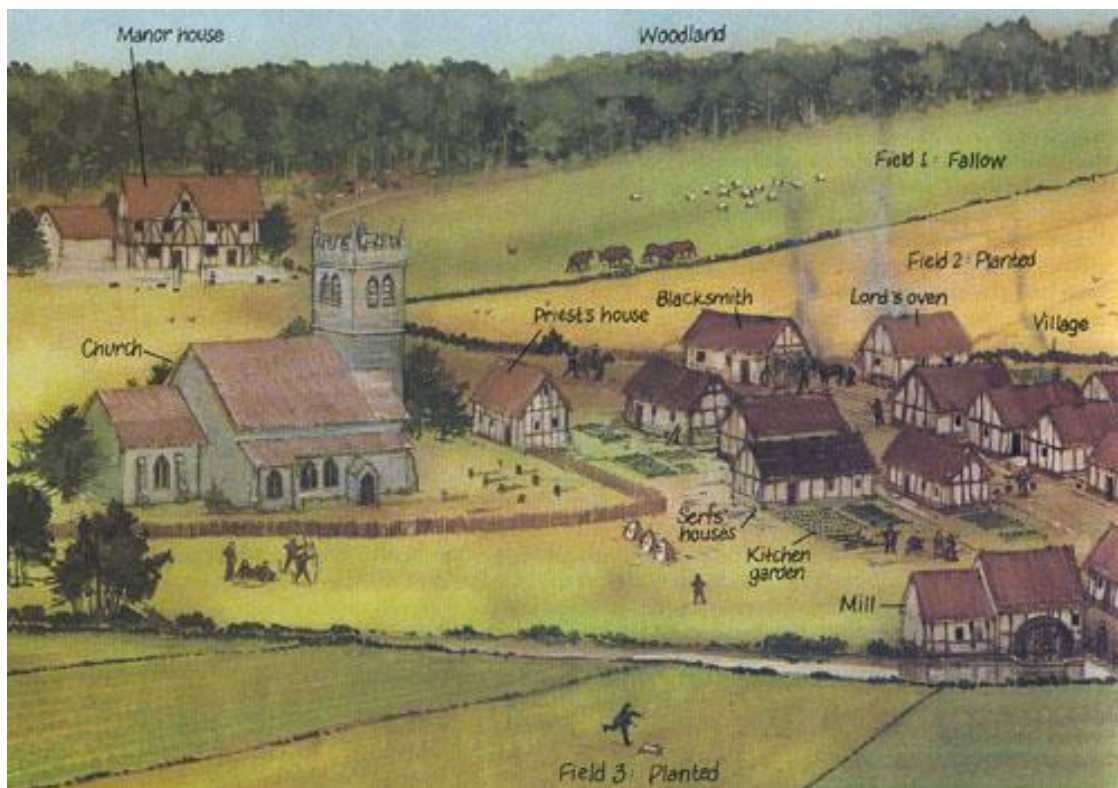
## The Manor (Manoralism) System

Most nobles lived on **manors**, which were large farms or estates on their fiefs. The noble became the lord of his manor. He was responsible for governing it. The manor was the source of the noble's wealth.

The **economy** of the feudal manor was based on agriculture. Economy is the way in which natural resources and workers are used to produce goods and services. The **peasants**, or farm workers, were the backbone and muscle of agriculture, which was the economic foundation of feudalism.

All peasants were either **freemen** or **serfs**. Most of them were serfs. The serf owed his labor to his lord. Serfs were not free to leave the manor without their lord's permission, but they could not be sold like slaves. Freemen owned or rented land from a lord. Freemen owed few, if any, obligations to a lord.

A manor also had a **village**, where the peasants lived. Most of the people who lived on the manor were peasants. A typical manor might have between 50 and 500 peasants. In addition to the peasant huts, a village usually had a church, a shed that served as a blacksmith shop, a mill for grinding grain, and farm fields.



A typical manor and village

## Economic Expansion and Change

Around 100 C.E., life began to improve in Western Europe. The period from 1000 to 1300 C.E. is called the **High Middle Ages**. By 800 C.E., farmers started using new inventions. Among these were the **iron plow, the harness, and the windmill**. Peasants began to use the **three-field system** to keep the soil fertile. These changes were an **Agricultural Revolution**. Farmers were able to produce more food. With more food, the population of Western Europe doubled in size.



Painting showing the use of the iron plow and a horse with a harness

<b>The Three-Field Rotation System</b>			
	<b>Field 1</b>	<b>Field 2</b>	<b>Field 3</b>
<b>First Year</b>	<u><b>Fall Season</b></u> Wheat, Rye or Barley	<u><b>Spring Season</b></u> Oats, Peas, Beans, or Lentils	<u><b>Fallow</b></u>
<b>Second Year</b>	<u><b>Fallow</b></u>	<u><b>Fall Season</b></u> Wheat, Rye or Barley	<u><b>Spring Season</b></u> Oats, Peas, Beans, or Lentils
<b>Third Year</b>	<u><b>Spring Season</b></u> Oats, Peas, Beans, or Lentils	<u><b>Fallow</b></u>	<u><b>Fall Season</b></u> Wheat, Rye or Barley
<p><u>Note:-</u>  <b>Fallow</b> meant that the field was left alone for an entire year allowing natural grasses to grown. Farm animals were graded on this field during the year. In fall it was plowed under to preserve the nutrients, especially nitrogen, from the wild grass.  <b>Wheat, Rye, Peas, Beans and Lentils</b> went to feed the <b>Humans</b>  <b>Oats and Barley</b> was grown to feed the <b>Horses and other animals</b></p>			

During the High Middle Ages, the economy of Western Europe grew stronger. As the population grew, people began to trade again. Merchants set up fairs. These meeting places grew into towns and cities. As trade increased, people developed new ways of doing business. They began using money instead of bartering. They developed banks for lending money. These and other changes were part of a **Commercial Revolution** or business revolution.

Medieval society also changed. A new **Middle Class** emerged. It included traders, merchants, and artisans. Artists and craftsmen formed **guilds**, or associations to keep the quality of work high. Fewer people were serfs. Instead, peasants rented the land they farmed. As cities grew bigger, they became noisy, crowded, and filthy. Still, cities continued to attract new people.

### Changes during the High Middle Ages

The growth of towns and the Agricultural Revolution transformed the way that people lived.

Agricultural Revolution
Increase in food production leads to population growth. A larger population needs more goods so trade increases.



Commercial Revolution
More trade requires new ways of doing business. Middle Class of merchants, traders, and craftspeople grows. As centers of trade, towns and cities grow much larger in a small amount of time.

A typical city scene during the High Middle Ages in Western Europe



Guilds people at work

