



## **The origin of feudalism**

After the Carolingian Empire, Europe was divided into numerous kingdoms. The kings were very weak. They had no armies and could not protect their lands.

The nobles or lords governed in the king's name in exchange for a fief or land. The nobles became the king's vassals by accepting the king's supremacy. They had their own armies and castles. They had complete control over their lands.

So the peasants had to work for the nobles in exchange for protection and submit to their authority. They became the nobles' serfs.

Feudalism was based on the exchange of land for military service. The nobles or lords promised to govern the land which they had been given, and to fight for the king with their armies when necessary.

### ***Read the sentences. What do they refer to?***

- *Land granted to a noble by the king:*
- *A person who received land from the king in return for homage and allegiance:*
- *A member of the lowest feudal class obliged to work for a noble:*
- *Under feudalism, the king did not have much of this:*
- *The king asked them to help him when his kingdom was in danger:*

## **Medieval society**

Medieval society was divided into three groups called estates: the nobles, the clergy and the workers.

- The nobles were the knights and their families. Their duty was to defend the population. They lived in a castle.
- The clergy were the monks and priests. They had to pray for the spiritual salvation of the people. They lived in churches or parishes and in monasteries or convents.
- The workers were mainly peasants, but also craftsmen and merchants. They produced and sold food and other things needed by society. They lived in small villages. Some peasants were serfs and others were freemen.

Except for the clergy, everybody was born into an estate. The nobles and the clergy were privileged estates and so they had advantages. For example, they did not pay taxes, they did not do manual work, and they held the most important positions in government.

However, the peasant had to pay a tax to use the mill, the oven and the press, to cross the bridge and to hunt in the forest. They had to pay a rent in money or products and also they had to work on the lord's land.



**True or false? Correct the false information.**

- A fief was a castle.
- The lords allowed merchants to cross their land and bridges free for charge
- The workers did not have the same privileges as the other estates
- The peasants paid a percentage of the harvest to the lords and to the Church.
- The clergy always lived in monasteries.

**Match the phrases. Then listen and check your answers**

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| a. The nobles            | 1. did not pay taxes or do manual work.              |
| b. The clergy            | 2. defended the population.                          |
| c. The workers           | 3. were mainly peasants.                             |
| d. The nobles and clergy | 4. prayed for the spiritual salvation of the people. |

**Medieval society. Underline the correct answer.**

- a. Ninety percent of the population were peasants / nobles.
- b. Pages / Serfs were the sons of nobles.
- c. The nobles' main activity was agriculture / war.
- d. Some peasants were freemen / squires and had more independence.
- e. The peasants lived better / worse than the noblemen.
- f. Noblewomen who did not work / marry went into convents.
- g. Peasant women had to / did not have to work.
- h. Nobles / Peasants had to be ready to go to war at any time.

**Complete the sentences.**

- a. Great nobles had complete \_\_\_\_\_ over their lands.
- b. Except for the \_\_\_\_\_, everyone was born into an estate.
- c. The \_\_\_\_\_ Church was present in all of western Europe.

**Complete the table:**

<i>The lords provided the vassals with</i>	<i>The vassals provided the lords with</i>

*military protection*  
*legal defence*

*counsel*  
*sustenance*

*economic aid*  
*military aid*

**Put the following groups in order of power:** knight, poor peasant, lord, rich peasant, craftsman, king.

- a) Which are the privileged groups?
- b) Which group is at the bottom? Why?
- c) Where did you place craftsmen? Why?



## ANSWERS OF THE EXERCISES:

**Read the sentences. What do they refer to?**

- Land granted to a noble by the king: **fief**
- A person who received land from the king in return for homage and allegiance: **vassal**
- A member of the lowest feudal class obliged to work for a noble: **serf**
- Under feudalism, the king did not have much of this: **power**
- The king asked them to help him when his kingdom was in danger: **nobles**

**True or false? Correct the false information.**

- A fief was a castle. **False. A fief was a land that nobles received in exchange for swearing allegiance to the king.**
- The lords allowed merchants to cross their land and bridges free for charge. **False. Merchants had to pay a tax.**
- The workers did not have the same privileges as the other estates. **True**
- The peasants paid a percentage of the harvest to the lords and to the Church **Tr**
- The clergy always lived in monasteries. **False. The clergy lived in monasteries or in parishes.**

**Match the phrases. Then listen and check your answers:** a2; b4; c3; d1

- a. The nobles defended the population
- b. The clergy prayed for the spiritual salvation of the people.
- c. The workers were mainly peasants.
- d. The nobles and clergy did not pay taxes or do manual work.

**Medieval society. Underline the correct answer.**

- a. Ninety percent of the population were **peasants** / nobles.
- b. **Pages** / Serfs were the sons of nobles.
- c. The nobles' main activity was agriculture / **war**.
- d. Some peasants were **freemen** / squires and had more independence.
- e. The peasants lived better / **worse** than the noblemen.
- f. Noblewomen who did not work / **marry** went into convents.
- g. Peasant women **had to** / did not have to work.
- h. **Nobles** / Peasants had to be ready to go to war at any time.

**Complete the sentences.**

- a. Great nobles had complete **control** over their lands.
- b. Except for the **clergy**, everyone was born into an estate.
- c. The **Catholic** Church was present in all of western Europe.

**Complete the table:**

<b>The lords provided the vassals with</b>	<b>The vassals provided the lords with</b>
military protection	economic aid
legal defence	counsel
sustenance	military aid

**Put the following groups in order of power:** king, lord, knight, craftsman, rich



peasant, poor peasant

a) **Which are the privileged groups?** The privileged groups are the king, the lords and the knights.

b) **Which group is at the bottom?** Why? The peasants are at the bottom of the pyramid because they worked on the lord's land and did not live well.

c) **Where did you place craftsmen?** Why? I placed craftsmen between knights and peasants. They did not belong to the nobility, but they had a better life than the peasants

