

## Document Packet: “Feudalism”

<b>Questions</b> :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Why does the author describe the time that he is writing about as the “night of the ninth century?”</li> <li>▪ According to his account, why did feudalism, as a political system, prove necessary or useful to European society?</li> </ul>
<b>Document #1</b>	
<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><b>SECONDARY SOURCE:</b> Frantz Funck-Brentano, <i>The Middle Ages</i>. Translated by E. O'Neill. London. Reinemann, 1922, 1-3.</p>	

<b>Questions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Why is it important to clarify definitions before discussing or debating topics?</li> <li>▪ According to this information, why has it been difficult to agree on a definition of "feudalism?"</li> </ul>
<b>Document #2</b>	
<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 Baltimore <i>Sun</i> that the Eastern Shore is feudal.</p>	
<p><b>SECONDARY SOURCE:</b> Sidney Painter, <i>Feudalism &amp; Liberty</i>. F. A. Cazel, ed. Baltimore. The John Hopkins Press, 1961, 3-6.</p>	

<b>Questions</b> :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Why did people look to be vassals to lords such as the one mentioned below?</li> <li>▪ How did the lord and his vassal depend on one another?</li> </ul>
<b>Document #3</b>	
<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><b>SOURCE:</b> <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>	

<b>Questions</b> :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What were the six things that a faithful vassal should have always kept in mind?</li> <li>▪ What was a vassal expected to do besides avoid injurious behavior?</li> <li>▪ Why might a vassal have more responsibilities and a lord much less?</li> </ul>
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**Document #4**

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.

**SOURCE:** F.A. Ogg, ecL, *A Source Book of Medieval History* (New York: American Book Company, 1907), 220-221. Reprinted in David Herlihy, ed., *The History of Feudalism*. (New York: Walker and Company, 1970), 97.

<b>Question:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How did the laws limit the power of a prince/lord?</li> <li>▪ What legal restrictions are placed on a liegeman [vassal] of a lord?</li> </ul>
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**Document #5**

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**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. . . .

**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.

**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).