

Medieval Society

Problem of dividing medieval society

Some merit to '3 orders'

Most people *were* knights, clergy, or peasants

Population ↑ 35 mil (1000) → 80 mil (1400)

Infant mortality still v high

Hazards

→disease

→famine

→lay nobility: warfare

→women: childbirth

Most kings didn't die violent deaths

Warfare: most clergy & peasants not at risk

Higher clergy: longer lifespan

Difficult to estimate life exp

→depended on wealth/gender/occupation/region

Most records from the wealthy

→often no birth dates, only death dates

Many lived until 60s, some till 80s

Village Society

Most western Europe: village societies

(11th & 12th centuries)

Lord owned land. Ruled population: owed him service, rent, allegiance

Most peasants paid rent in service & money

Peasants & Serfdom

Free/unfree peasants = most of population

→Free peasants: freedom to move

→Serfs: tied to lord's land

10th cent: Slaves common southern Europe

→Church opposed to Christians as slaves

Freedom = hereditary

→you're a serf? so are your kids!

Peasants & Serfdom (cont)

→Some free peasants gave up freedom for lord's protection (food)

Early middle ages: more land, less labour, serfs needed

→After 10th cent: reversed

End of 12th century: serf's role more defined

→Pros: swifter justice, limited rights, stronger foundation

Assarting

→Serfs could gain freedom

Liberty

For those free, society = mobile to an extent

→limited range of occupations

→by 12th cent, merchant & artisan classes grew

→**Artisans**: miners; smiths; shipbuilders; carpenters; stonemasons

→**Merchants**: organised market & trade

Lending money w/ interested - forbidden by Church

→ban didn't apply to Jews; Jewish merchants involved in moneylending

Between 11th & 15th cents, merchant classes grew w/ towns

By granting autonomy & privileges, everyone profited

Italy: more complicated

→long tradition of civic life, some cities v rich & powerful

→fragmented political rivalry

→11th cent: rise of port cities - Pisa, Venice, Genoa

'Feudal system'/'Feudalism'

These concepts/terms in wide use since mid 19th cent

Marxists: 'feudal society' to explain pre-cap

Legal historians: 'feudal society' for specific legal rship

Terms and concepts v problematic:

→overgeneralise

→presuppose existence of coherent system across kingdoms & times

Some argue terms are good to introduce students to the Middle Ages

Feudal bond: special legal rship between knight & lord

→Lord: recruits knights, rewards w/ feudal bond

→Established through homage & oath

Homage: vassal kneels before his lord & places his hands in his lord's hands

Oath: then rises and takes an oath of loyalty to lord

Rship: mutual benefit

→Knight: got land and money

→Lord: got loyalty and military service

Fief: plot of land given to vassal

By 11th/12th cents, more common for vassals to have 1+ lord

→Weakened bond between lord & vassal

→i.e. one lord at war w/ the other, who does vassal fight for?



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