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
Someargue 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?