Unit 3. Feudal Europe

A period of instability
From about 850 to 1100, Europe was divided and weak, so a new wave of invasions altered the continent. Three new people appeared in scene: the Vikings (from Scandinavia), the Magyars (from the steppes of Asia) and the Muslims (from North Africa).

These invasions created a climate of violence and insecurity understood as a punishment from God and a sign that the world would end in the year 1000. Besides, the European kings were very weak; they had no stable armies and could not protect their lands and citizens.

THE FEUDAL MONARCHY
The king occupied the highest position in society. He was considered to be a tool and chosen by God’s power, so the Church had the right to give him the crown and the title of king.

The king rewarded his vassals with land and titles if they served him in his kingdom. In return, the vassals had to perform services for the king. They had to protect him and his family, and they owed him a certain amount of money and service.

THE PRIVILEGED: THE NOBLES
Many nobles possessed large fiefs from which they were independent. Their power and influence depended on these fiefs, and the Church’s approval and the king’s support were essential to their position.

The nobles also had to pay taxes and provide soldiers to defend the kingdom. They were often involved in politics and were responsible for the administration and the justice within their fiefs.
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Wave of Invasions - 9th-10th Centuries

Invasions of Europe, 800–1000

Settlements and invasion routes:
- Magyars
- Muslims
- Vikings

Iceland

Norway

Sweden

Scotland

North Sea

Denmark

England

France

Spain

Africa

Italy

Byzantine Empire

Byzantium

Rome

Constantinople

Ireland

Portugal

Aral Sea

Caspian Sea

Atlantic Ocean

Arctic Circle

Lambert Azimuthal Equal-Area projection

Prezi
Vassalage, the basis of feudalism

Because the monarchs were unable to protect their people, they relied on the nobles for support and established a new system of relationships called **vassalage**.

Vassalage was a promise of allegiance established in a dual **ceremony**:

- The **homage**, in which the vassal knelt before the king and promised to be loyal and provide him with military and economic help.
- The **investiture**, in which the king a fiefdom to a vassal.

Then, a feudal lord could, in turn, transfer part of his fiefdom to lesser nobles (knights).
For protection, many free men and women turned to the most powerful nobles. Those who could afford military equipment became knights, while peasants fell into serfdom.

So **Feudalism** could be defined as the dominant social system in medieval Europe, in which the nobility held lands from the Crown in exchange for military service, and vassals were in turn tenants of the nobles, while the peasants were obligated to live on their lord's land and give him homage, labour, and a share of the produce, in exchange for military protection.
FEUDAL SOCIETY

In return, the lords and nobles agreed to supply the king with soldiers and horses for his army.

The king owned all the land in the country and made the laws—he gave an area of land called a fief to rich lords and nobles.

The nobles gave some land to professional soldiers.

Peasants worked the land for the nobles and knights who in turn offered them protection.

In return these Knights fought for nobles & the king.

It was grouped into estates:

- The privileged: who were the minority (nobles and clergy).

- The non-privileged: they were the majority (peasants and artisans).
THE FEUDAL MONARCHY

The king occupied the higher position in society. He was considered to be sacred and chosen by God to govern, so the Church had to validate him in a coronation ceremony.

His lands (his kingdom) were his personal property and he was free to divide or unit them. In fact, boundaries changed a lot during the Middle Ages because kings usually divided their kingdoms between hairs. Also, many kings had no permanent residence and they moved between their cities and castles with their court.

This court was composed by the most important nobles and religious authorities, but they had supreme authority to take decisions (taxes, military campaigns, etc.)

In matters of government they received help and advice from the Curia (bishops, abbots, dukes, counts and marquis)
Analyze a map (IDAC)
THE PRIVILEGED: THE NOBLES

Many nobles possessed large fiefdoms from which they earned an income. Their power and influence depended on these lands and the vassalage agreements that they had sworn to.

The role of the nobles was to militarily protect society, so the most important activity for them was training for battle. They also went hunting on horseback and practised falconry, which involved training a bird to hunt.

Noblewomen (ladies) were responsible for the servants and domestic matters. They also played music, rode horses and hunted.
A feudal castle

Nobles lived in **fortified castles**. There, they used to pass the days collecting taxes, checking the fortifications and weapons and imparting justice.

The castle was usually located on high ground in a fiefdom. Their walls are high and they served as a refuge for peasants in case of danger. Inside, there was a series of buildings around one or more courtyards.

Castles had to be **self-sufficient** so markets developed inside and artisans' workshops supplied everything they needed.
LET'S CREATE YOUR OWN COAT OF ARMS!
THE PRIVILEGED: THE CLERGY

Most people living in Europe in the Middle Ages were Christians, whose social and spiritual lives were controlled by the Church.

The church was the most important building in any city or village because its bells marked rhythm of daily life. Besides, the Church also marked the ceremonies in a person's life (baptism, marriage and funeral) as well as festivities throughout the year. Christians had to fulfill certain religious obligations (pray every day, go to Mass on Sunday, etc.), to practice charity and to make a pilgrimage to a holy place (Rome, Jerusalem or Santiago).

The Church accumulated great riches and many members of the clergy had privileged positions.

It owned considerable lands and buildings and it received a tithe from peasants living on its lands. It also received donations.

![Image of church and clergy](Image)
The organization of the Church
A FIEFDOM: LORDS AND PEASANTS

Most lands during the Middle Ages was in the hands of the nobility or the clergy. **Fiefdoms** were not private but *entailed property*, that meant they could be inherited by the lord's descendants but not sold.

**Peasants**, who made up 90% of the population, were responsible for farming the land and raising the livestock. Another obligations were:
- Provide their labour.
- Pay the census, monopoly rights and other taxes.
- Pay for the right to use the forest and to fish in the river.
- Obey all the lord's orders.
- Help with the maintenance of the castle.

We can make the difference between **free peasants** (they could get married, leave the fiefdom and trade) and **serfs** (had no personal freedom and depend on the lord's permissions).
Crops calendar
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THE FEUDAL MONARCHY
The king occupied the highest position in society. He was considered to be sacred and chosen by God to govern, as the Church had told their vassals to cooperate with him.

This king's authority was limited by the Church. He could not impose taxes without their consent. The Church also provided security for the king's family and his subjects.

In return, the vassals were expected to obey the king's orders and protect him. They also provided military support.

THE PRIVILEGED: THE NOBLES
Many nobles owned large estates from which they reaped a fortune. Their power and influence depended on these fiefs, and their power grew as they increased their holdings. The nobles of the Left Bank enjoyed more power than their counterparts on the Right Bank.

The feudal code was written in a way that favored the nobles. They were exempt from certain taxes and had the right to do battle. They also enjoyed immunity from prison and death, though their freedom was limited in certain cases.

The nobles were also responsible for the protection of their fiefs and the locals within it. They also played major roles in the administrative and judicial systems.

THE COMMONER
The commoners formed the majority of the population. They were the peasants who tilled the land and the artisans who worked to support their families.

The commoners were not immune to the feudal system's hardships. They were often exploited and oppressed by their lords. They were also subject to various taxes and duties.

In conclusion, the feudal system was a complex and intricate system that shaped the history and development of Europe.