



# Feudalism in Europe

## MAIN IDEA

### POWER AND AUTHORITY

Feudalism, a political and economic system based on land-holding and protective alliances, emerges in Europe.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The rights and duties of feudal relationships helped shape today's forms of representative government.

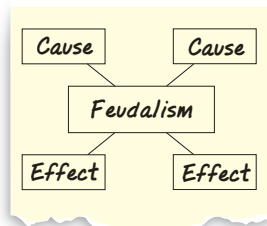
## TERMS & NAMES

- lord
- serf
- fief
- manor
- vassal
- tithe
- knight

**SETTING THE STAGE** After the Treaty of Verdun, Charlemagne's three feuding grandsons broke up the kingdom even further. Part of this territory also became a battleground as new waves of invaders attacked Europe. The political turmoil and constant warfare led to the rise of European feudalism, which, as you read in Chapter 2, is a political and economic system based on land ownership and personal loyalty.

## TAKING NOTES

**Analyzing Causes and Recognizing Effects** Use a web diagram to show the causes and effects of feudalism.



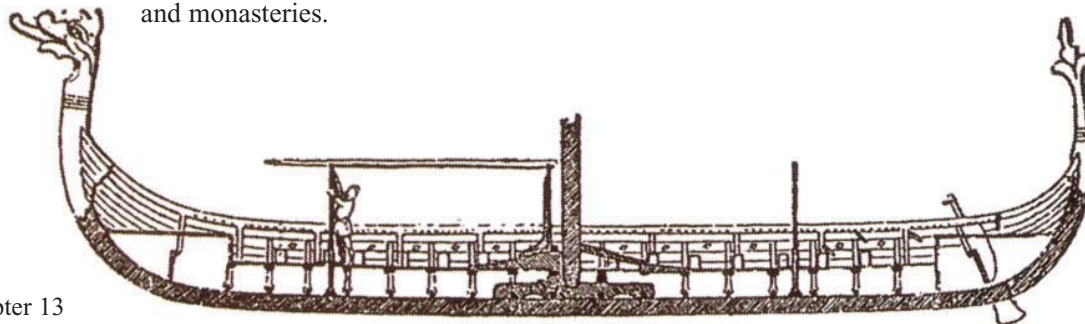
## Invaders Attack Western Europe

From about 800 to 1000, invasions destroyed the Carolingian Empire. Muslim invaders from the south seized Sicily and raided Italy. In 846, they sacked Rome. Magyar invaders struck from the east. Like the earlier Huns and Avars, they terrorized Germany and Italy. And from the north came the fearsome Vikings.

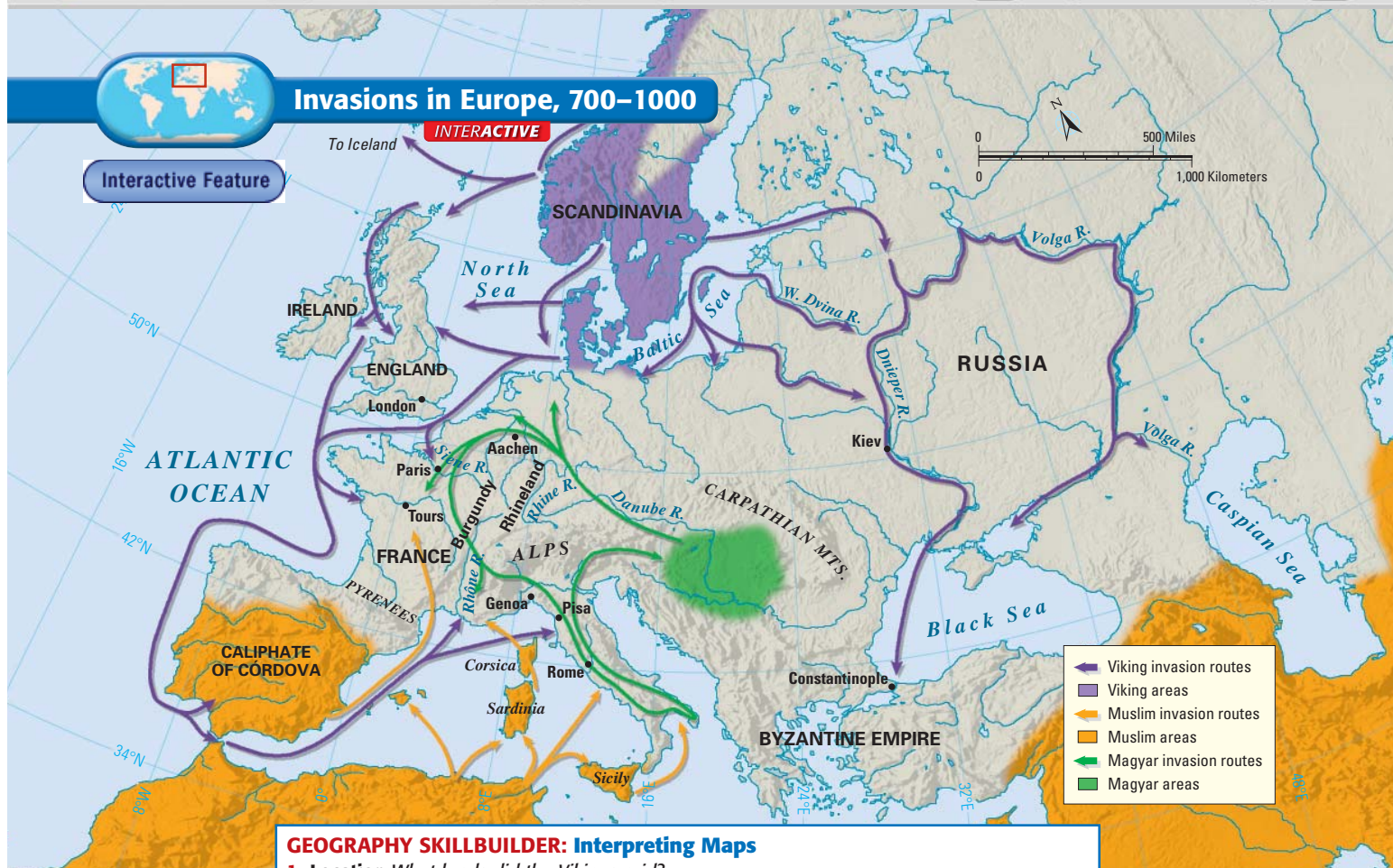
**The Vikings Invade from the North** The Vikings set sail from Scandinavia (SKAN•duh•NAY•vee•uh), a wintry, wooded region in Northern Europe. (The region is now the countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.) The Vikings, also called Northmen or Norsemen, were a Germanic people. They worshiped warlike gods and took pride in nicknames like Eric Bloodaxe and Thorfinn Skullsplitter.

The Vikings carried out their raids with terrifying speed. Clutching swords and heavy wooden shields, these helmeted seafarers beached their ships, struck quickly, and then moved out to sea again. They were gone before locals could mount a defense. Viking warships were awe-inspiring. The largest of these long ships held 300 warriors, who took turns rowing the ship's 72 oars. The prow of each ship swept grandly upward, often ending with the carved head of a sea monster. A ship might weigh 20 tons when fully loaded. Yet, it could sail in a mere three feet of water. Rowing up shallow creeks, the Vikings looted inland villages and monasteries.

▼ A sketch of a Viking longboat



## Invasions in Europe, 700–1000



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- Location** What lands did the Vikings raid?
- Movement** Why were the Viking, Magyar, and Muslim invasions so threatening to Europe?

The Vikings were not only warriors but also traders, farmers, and explorers. They ventured far beyond western Europe. Vikings journeyed down rivers into the heart of Russia, to Constantinople, and even across the icy waters of the North Atlantic. A Viking explorer named Leif (leef) Ericson reached North America around 1000, almost 500 years before Columbus. About the same time, the Viking reign of terror in Europe faded away. As Vikings gradually accepted Christianity, they stopped raiding monasteries. Also, a warming trend in Europe's climate made farming easier in Scandinavia. As a result, fewer Scandinavians adopted the seafaring life of Viking warriors.

**Magyars and Muslims Attack from the East and South** As Viking invasions declined, Europe became the target of new assaults. The Magyars, a group of nomadic people, attacked from the east, from what is now Hungary. Superb horsemen, the Magyars swept across the plains of the Danube River and invaded western Europe in the late 800s. They attacked isolated villages and monasteries. They overran northern Italy and reached as far west as the Rhineland and Burgundy. The Magyars did not settle conquered land. Instead, they took captives to sell as slaves.

The Muslims struck from the south. They began their encroachments from their strongholds in North Africa, invading through what are now Italy and Spain. In the 600s and 700s, the Muslim plan was to conquer and settle in Europe. By the 800s and 900s, their goal was also to plunder. Because the Muslims were expert seafarers, they were able to attack settlements on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts. They also struck as far inland as Switzerland.

The invasions by Vikings, Magyars, and Muslims caused widespread disorder and suffering. Most western Europeans lived in constant danger. Kings could not

effectively defend their lands from invasion. As a result, people no longer looked to a central ruler for security. Instead, many turned to local rulers who had their own armies. Any leader who could fight the invaders gained followers and political strength. **A**

**MAIN IDEA****Recognizing Effects**

**A** What was the impact of Viking, Magyar, and Muslim invasions on medieval Europe?

## A New Social Order: Feudalism

In 911, two former enemies faced each other in a peace ceremony. Rollo was the head of a Viking army. Rollo and his men had been plundering the rich Seine (sayn) River valley for years. Charles the Simple was the king of France but held little power. Charles granted the Viking leader a huge piece of French territory. It became known as Northmen's land, or Normandy. In return, Rollo swore a pledge of loyalty to the king.

**Feudalism Structures Society** The worst years of the invaders' attacks spanned roughly 850 to 950. During this time, rulers and warriors like Charles and Rollo made similar agreements in many parts of Europe. The system of governing and landholding, called feudalism, had emerged in Europe. A similar feudal system existed in China under the Zhou Dynasty, which ruled from around the 11th century B.C. until 256 B.C. Feudalism in Japan began in A.D. 1192 and ended in the 19th century.

The feudal system was based on rights and obligations. In exchange for military protection and other services, a **lord**, or landowner, granted land called a fief. The person receiving a **fief** was called a **vassal**. Charles the Simple, the lord, and Rollo, the vassal, showed how this two-sided bargain worked. Feudalism depended on the control of land.

**The Feudal Pyramid** The structure of feudal society was much like a pyramid. At the peak reigned the king. Next came the most powerful vassals—wealthy landowners such as nobles and bishops. Serving beneath these vassals were knights. **Knights** were mounted horsemen who pledged to defend their lords' lands in exchange for fiefs. At the base of the pyramid were landless peasants who toiled in the fields. (See Analyzing Key Concepts on next page.)

**Social Classes Are Well Defined** In the feudal system, status determined a person's prestige and power. Medieval writers classified people into three groups: those who fought (nobles and knights), those who prayed (men and women of the Church), and those who worked (the peasants). Social class was usually inherited.

In Europe in the Middle Ages, the vast majority of people were peasants. Most peasants were serfs. **Serfs** were people who could not lawfully leave the place where they were born. Though bound to the land, serfs were not slaves. Their lords could not sell or buy them. But what their labor produced belonged to the lord.

**Vocabulary**

*Status* is social ranking.

## Manors: The Economic Side of Feudalism

The **manor** was the lord's estate. During the Middle Ages, the manor system was the basic economic arrangement. The manor system rested on a set of rights and obligations between a lord and his serfs. The lord provided the serfs with housing, farmland, and protection from bandits. In return, serfs tended the lord's lands, cared for his animals, and performed other tasks to maintain the estate. Peasant women shared in the farm work with their husbands. All peasants, whether free or serf, owed the lord certain duties. These included at least a few days of labor each week and a certain portion of their grain.

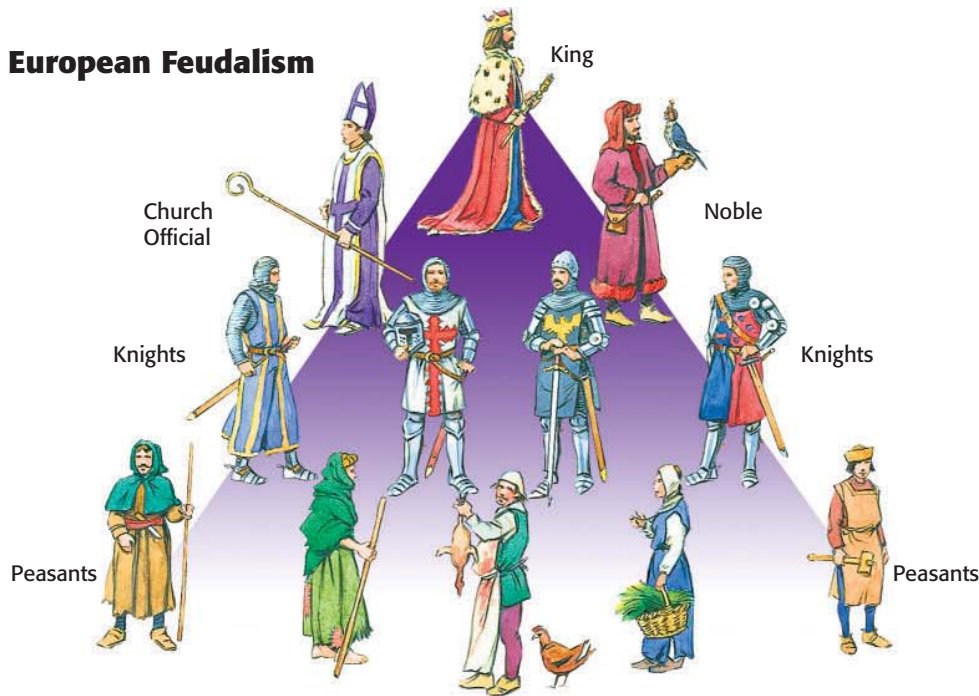
**A Self-Contained World** Peasants rarely traveled more than 25 miles from their own manor. By standing in the center of a plowed field, they could see their entire world at a glance. A manor usually covered only a few square miles of land. It

## > Analyzing Key Concepts

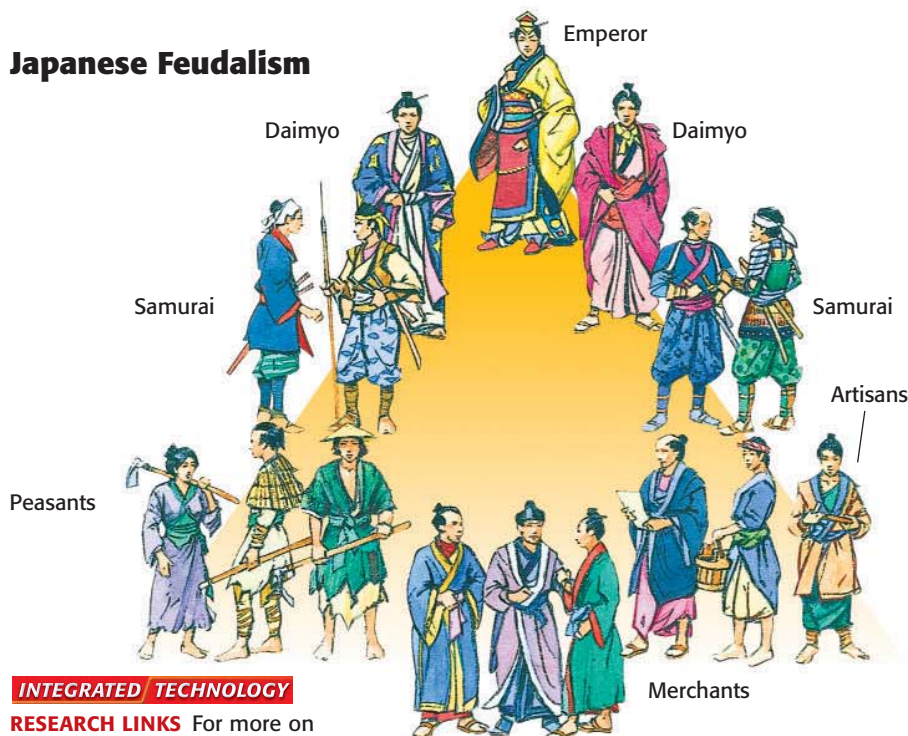
# Feudalism

Feudalism was a political system in which nobles were granted the use of land that legally belonged to the king. In return, the nobles agreed to give their loyalty and military services to the king. Feudalism developed not only in Europe but also in countries like Japan.

### European Feudalism



### Japanese Feudalism



#### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**RESEARCH LINKS** For more on feudalism, go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com)

## > DATA FILE

### FEUDAL FACTS AND FIGURES

- In the 14th century, before the bubonic plague struck, the population of France was probably between 10 and 21 million people.
- In feudal times, the building of a cathedral took between 50 to 150 years.
- In feudal times, dukedoms were large estates ruled by a duke. In 1216, the Duke of Anjou had 34 knights, the Duke of Brittany had 36 knights, and the Count of Flanders had 47 knights.
- In the 14th century, the nobility in France made up about 1 percent of the population.
- The word *feudalism* comes from the Latin word *feudum*, meaning *fief*.
- The Japanese word *daimyo* comes from the words *dai*, meaning "large," and *myo* (shorten from *myoden*), meaning "name-land" or "private land."

\* *SOURCES: A Distant Mirror* by Barbara Tuchman; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

## Connect to Today

**1. Comparing** What are the similarities between feudalism in Europe and feudalism in Japan?

See Skillbuilder Handbook, Page R7.

**2. Forming and Supporting Opinions** Today, does the United States have a system of social classes? Support your answer with evidence.



consent. After all these payments to the lord, peasant families owed the village priest a **tithe**, or church tax. A tithe represented one-tenth of their income.

Serfs lived in crowded cottages, close to their neighbors. The cottages had only one or two rooms. If there were two rooms, the main room was used for cooking, eating, and household activities. The second was the family bedroom. Peasants warmed their dirt-floor houses by bringing pigs inside. At night, the family huddled on a pile of straw that often crawled with insects. Peasants' simple diet consisted mainly of vegetables, coarse brown bread, grain, cheese, and soup.

*Piers Plowman*, written by William Langland in 1362, reveals the hard life of English peasants:

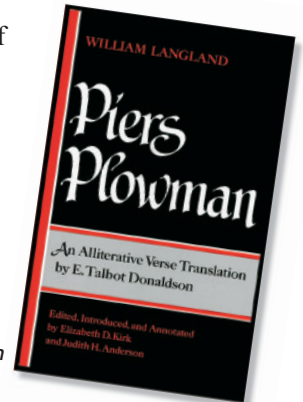
**MAIN IDEA****Analyzing Primary Sources**

What problems did peasant families face?

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

What by spinning they save, they spend it in house-hire,  
Both in milk and in meal to make a mess of porridge,  
To cheer up their children who chafe for their food,  
And they themselves suffer surely much hunger  
And woe in the winter, with waking at nights  
And rising to rock an oft restless cradle.

WILLIAM LANGLAND, *Piers Plowman*



For most serfs, both men and women, life was work and more work. Their days revolved around raising crops and livestock and taking care of home and family. As soon as children were old enough, they were put to work in the fields or in the home. Many children did not survive to adulthood. Illness and malnutrition were constant afflictions for medieval peasants. Average life expectancy was about 35 years. And during that short lifetime, most peasants never traveled more than 25 miles from their homes.

Yet, despite the hardships they endured, serfs accepted their lot in life as part of the Church's teachings. They, like most Christians during medieval times, believed that God determined a person's place in society.

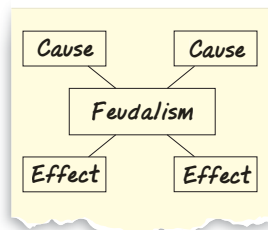
**SECTION****2****ASSESSMENT**

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- lord
- fief
- vassal
- knight
- serf
- manor
- tithe

**USING YOUR NOTES**

2. What is the main reason feudalism developed? Explain.

**MAIN IDEAS**

3. What groups invaded Europe in the 800s?
4. What obligations did a peasant have to the lord of the manor?
5. What were the three social classes of the feudal system?

**CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING**

6. **COMPARING** How were the Vikings different from earlier Germanic groups that invaded Europe?
7. **MAKING INFERENCES** How was a manor largely self-sufficient both militarily and economically during the early Middle Ages?
8. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** What benefits do you think a medieval manor provided to the serfs who lived there?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **POWER AND AUTHORITY** Draw up a **contract** between a lord and a vassal, such as a knight, or between the lord of a manor and a serf. Include the responsibilities, obligations, and rights of each party.

**CONNECT TO TODAY** **WRITING A NEWS ARTICLE**

Research modern marauders, who, like the Vikings of history, are involved in piracy on the seas. Write a brief **news article** describing their activities.