

Power In The Middle Ages

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Introduction

- During the Middle Ages, power and land was everything. Without power, your life would be very rough with a lack of many simple needs. If you had little power, you would have to pay high taxes, work dreadful hours, and more. All in favour of land, and people in higher authority. Depending on your hierarchy in the feudal system, the structure of the Middle Ages will affect and treat you differently. The top of the feudal system hierarchy had the most power and privilege, while the bottom of the hierarchy had quite the opposite lifestyle. But what really is the feudal system, and what quality of life did a person have?

Feudal System

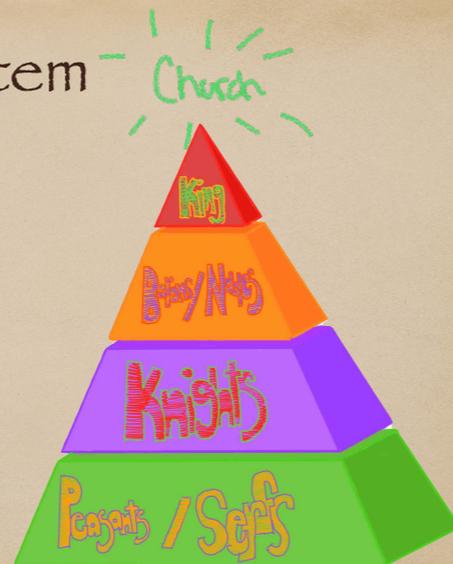
What is the Feudal System?

-The Feudal system was used in the early and central Middle Ages to represent ones social and political hierarchy of possession and relationship of land.

Why Land?

-Land was the base of economy, and having control/ ownership of land would lead to having more power. Having more power during the Middle Ages was very important, as people with less power, were often treated roughly to say the least. The feudal system was a simple way to organize peoples roles of land and power.

The feudal system diagram to the right, represents the levels of power and control over land. However, the system is more complicated then it looks so I will elaborate on each role of the Medieval times.



Church

- The Church held the most power overall. The church had power to Influence and demand many things, such as;

- Ability to tax people
- Use laws and beliefs of the bible to their power
- Create laws
- Punishment for those who do not follow laws
- Power to execute people
- Power to influence many people to do things in the church's favour



-The church's influence was very strong. For example, they demanded peasants to do labour work for the church 6 days a week, and had to pay 10% of their earnings to the church in a tax called tithe.

They also would charge you to get baptized, married, and to have a "proper" funeral. If you did not do the above, the Church would threaten you to hell (hell was not a pleasant idea at the time). -The church has the power to take control of the people (including the king) because during the Middle Ages, the church was in control of almost everyone's belief system, so if the church told citizens a certain idea is hateful and fearful (like hell), the Church would take advantage of that fear and use it to their power. Which naturally gave the church loads of power.

KING

- The King was the face and leader of the feudal system. He was in control of all land but it was a heavy duty to take care of so much land, so he would relieve himself by dividing the land amongst the barons.
- In return, the barons pledged loyalty, and soldiers to the king.
- Having the power to divide and control land made the king extremely powerful. The King would also hold power over making many laws specifically around land, and had power to threaten and kill people of crime.



Barons/Nobles

- The Barons and Nobles (also known as lords) were just a step under the king's authority.
- Barons and high ranking nobles ruled large areas of land (fiefs). They would report directly to the king and divided their land among Lords who ran individual manors which made barons and nobles very powerful. They could control parts of land and people who lived there.
- Their job was to maintain an army at the king's service in return of the king granting them land. If they did not have an army in return, they would pay a tax called shield to the king.



Knights

- The knights were ranked under barons/nobles as being considered warriors. Knights were known to show bravery, strength and skill in battle, to respect women, to defend the weak, to be loyal to his lord, family and friends.
- Their duty was to fight to protect the lord, land, and the people. Knights fought for their lords who in return fought for their king.
- In return of the Knights work, their lord would provide him with lodging, food, armour, weapons, horses, money, and land where peasants would work.
- Because of the knight's strength and resources, they were almost equivalent to our middle class. They were respected by others, had a comfortable lifestyle all while working to feed their families.



Peasants/Serfs

- Peasants and Serfs were at the bottom of everyone's mind. They had a very rough and hard lifestyle. Peasants worked long hours each day to just feed themselves and their families.
- Each week they spent ~3 days working to pay off their obligations to their local lord, and would spend a couple days either finding goods, or doing free labour dedicated to the tithing tax that the church demanded. In total they would work doing heavy labour, ~6 days per week.
- Some peasants were known as slightly more "free" with their own small businesses, while other peasants were treated almost as slaves while working under their lord's authority.
- Peasants had little to no power as they did not own any land or anything that could give them any kind of respect, and were never treated equally.



Conclusion

- Overall, the people of the Middle Ages did not have an extremely high quality of life, and many people were definitely not treated fairly. Peasants were powerless, and others were floating with hungry power. The system was very strict and unforgiving. However, as a society I hope we can continue to learn from our past mistakes, creating an improved power balance for all benefits.