

FEUDALISM vs. MANORIALISM

Feudalism

I INTRODUCTION to Feudalism

Feudalism was a contractual system of political and military relationships existing among the nobility in Western Europe during the High Middle Ages. (It had nothing to do with blood feuds; the two words came to be spelled alike in the 17th century, but have no etymological relationship.) Feudalism was characterized by the granting of fiefs, chiefly in the form of land and labor, in return for political and military services - a contract sealed by oaths of homage and fealty (fidelity). The grantor was lord of the grantee, his vassal, but both were free men and social peers, and feudalism must not be confused with seignorialism, the system of relations between the lords and their peasants in the same period. Feudalism joined political and military service with landholding to preserve medieval Europe from disintegrating into myriad independent seigneuries after the fall of the Carolinian Empire.

II ORIGINS of Feudalism

When the German invaders conquered the western Roman Empire in the 5th century, they destroyed the professional Roman army and substituted their own armies, made up of warriors who served their chieftains for honor and booty. The warriors fought on foot and lived off the countryside. As long as they fought one another, they needed no cavalry. But when the Muslims, the Vikings, and the Magyars invaded Europe in the 8th, 9th, and 10th centuries, the Germans found themselves unable to deal with these rapid-moving armies. First, Charles Martel in Gaul, then King Alfred in England, and finally Henry the Fowler of Germany provided horses for some of their soldiers to repel the raids into their lands. It is not certain that these troops fought on horseback, but they could pursue their enemies faster mounted than on foot, and as stirrups were then coming into use, it is probable that cavalry actions began to take place in this same period. They were certainly occurring in the 11th century.

A. Early System of Feudalism

Warhorses were expensive, and training in their use took years of practice. To support his cavalry soldiers, Martel gave them estates of land farmed by dependent laborers, which he took from the church. Such estates, called benefices, were given

for the duration of the soldiers' service. The soldiers were called vassals (from a Gaelic word meaning servant). The vassals, however, being selected soldiers with whom the Carolingian rulers surrounded themselves, became models for the aristocrats who followed the court. With the breakup of the Carolingian Empire in the 9th century, many powerful men strove to assemble their own bands of mounted vassals, giving them benefices in return for their services. Some of the weaker landowners then found themselves obliged to enter into vassalage and to concede their lands to the lordship of the more powerful, receiving them back as benefices. The greater lords were expected to protect their vassals, as the vassals were expected to serve their benefactors.

B. Classical Feudalism

These military relationships of the 8th and 9th centuries are sometimes described as Carolingian feudalism, but they lack some of the essential features of classical feudalism, which developed in and after the 10th century. It was only toward the year 1000 that the term fief began to be used instead of benefice, and the change of term reflected a change in the institution. Now the estate given a vassal was commonly understood to be hereditary, provided the vassal's heir was satisfactory to the lord, and provided he paid an inheritance tax called a relief. The vassal not only took the oath of fealty, which everyone owed to his lord, but also a special oath of homage to the feudal lord who invested him with a fief. Thus, feudalism was a political as well as military institution, one based upon a contract between two individuals, both of whom held rights in the fief.

C. Reasons for the Feudal Pattern

Warfare was endemic in the feudal period, but feudalism did not cause warfare; warfare caused feudalism. Nor was feudalism responsible for the collapse of the Carolingian Empire; rather, the failure of that state made feudalism necessary. The Carolingian Empire collapsed because it was based on the rule of one man, who did not have institutions sufficiently well developed to carry out his will. The empire's disappearance threatened Europe with anarchy: thousands of individual seigneurs ruling their people entirely independent of any suzerain authority. The bonds of feudalism re-knit the local seigneuries into a loose unity, under which the seigneurs gave up only as much of their freedom as was essential to effective cooperation. Under the leadership of their feudal lords, the united vassals were able to fend off invaders and then to create feudal principalities of some size and complexity. When feudalism proved its worth on a local basis, kings and emperors adopted it to strengthen their monarchies.

III MATURITY – Late Feudalism

Feudalism reached its maturity in the 11th century and flourished in the 12th and 13th centuries. Its cradle was the region between the Rhine and Loire rivers, but in the late 11th century rulers of that region conquered southern Italy and Sicily, England, and, with the First Crusade, the Holy Land. To each place they took their feudal institutions. Southern France, Spain, northern Italy, and Germany also adopted some degree of feudalism in the 12th century. Even central and eastern Europe came under its spell to a limited degree, especially after the Byzantine Empire was feudalized following the Fourth Crusade.

A. Characteristics of Mature Feudalism

In its classical form Western feudalism assumed that most or, in England, all of the land belonged to the sovereign prince - be he king or duke, marquis or count - who held it "of no one but God." The prince then granted fiefs to his barons, who made their oaths of homage and fealty to him and were required to give him political and military service according to the terms of the grant. The barons, in turn, might grant portions of their fiefs to knights who swore homage and fealty to them and served them according to their grants. Thus, if a king granted a fief of a dozen seigneuries to a baron and required the service of ten knights, the baron could grant ten of the seigneuries to ten knights and thus be prepared to provide the required service to the king. Of course, a baron might seek to keep all of his fief in his demesne (his personal domain) and keep his knights in his hall, feeding and arming them out of his own pocket; but this was resisted by the knights, who wanted to be seigneurs themselves. Knights might acquire two or more fiefs, and then they too might find it desirable to subgrant what they needed to provide the service for which they were obligated. By such subinfeudation, a feudal pyramid was created, providing the suzerain at the top, and each mesne lord below, with a feudal force of knights to serve him at his summons.

Complications occurred when a knight accepted fiefs from more than one lord, but the institution of liege homage was invented to enable him to declare one of his lords his liege lord, whom he would serve personally, while he would send his vassals to serve his other lords. It was also the rule in France that "the lord of my lord is not my lord"; thus, it was not rebellion for a sub-vassal to fight against his lord's lord. In England, however, William the Conqueror and his successors required their vassals' vassals to take oaths of fealty to them.

B. Duties of a Vassal

Military service in the field was basic to feudalism, but it was far from all that the vassal owed to his lord. When the lord had a castle, he might require his vassals to garrison it, a service called castle-guard. The lord also expected his vassals to attend his court in order to give him advice and to participate in judgments of cases concerning other vassals. If the lord had need for money, he might expect his vassals to give him financial aid. During the 12th and 13th centuries many conflicts between lords and their vassals arose over just what services should be rendered. In England it was the Magna Charta that defined the obligations of the king's vassals; for example, they did not have to give financial aid except on the occasion of the marriage of the king's eldest daughter, the knighting of his eldest son, and the king's own ransom. In France it was common to find a fourth occasion for feudal aid: a lord's crusade. Giving advice also led to a demand by the vassals that their assent be sought on those of their lords' decisions that involved them, whether it be war, marriage alliance, taxation, or legal judgment.

C. Inheritance and Wardship

Another area of feudal custom that required definition was that of the succession to fiefs. When fiefs became hereditary, the lord reserved an inheritance tax called a relief, and the size of the relief was often a matter of conflict. Again, in England, the Magna Charta established the relief as £100 for a barony and £5 for a knight's fee; elsewhere, custom varied from fief to fief. Lords reserved the right to secure a useful and loyal holder of a fief. If a vassal died and left a son of full age who was a good knight, the lord had no reason to object to his succession. If the son was a minor, however, or if the heir was female, the lord would want to control the fief until the heir was of age or the heiress married to a man the lord approved of; thus arose the lord's right of wardship for a minor or female heir and his further right of marriage, which might, in some fiefs, lead to his choosing the partner himself. The widow of a vassal had a lifetime right of dower in her husband's fief (commonly a third of the value), and this also led to the lord's interest in her remarriage; in some fiefs he had a full right to control such a remarriage. In the event a vassal died childless, the relationship of his heirs to the lord could vary: Brothers were usually acceptable but cousins might not be. If no heirs were acceptable to the lord, the fief was declared an escheat and returned to his full control; he could then keep it in his demesne or grant it to any knight he chose to make his vassal.

D. Breach of Contract

Because the feudal relationship was contractual, false actions on either side could cause breach of contract. When the vassal failed to perform required services, the lord could bring charges against him in his court before the other vassals, and if they found their peer guilty, he would be declared to have forfeited his fief, which would return to the lord's demesne. If the vassal chose to try to defend his land, the lord might have to go to war against him to win control of the forfeited fief. But the fact that the vassal's peers had found him guilty meant that they were morally as well as legally obligated to enforce their judgment, and it was a rare vassal who would war against his lord and all his peers. On the other hand, if a vassal felt that his lord had failed to live up to his obligations, he could defy the lord - that is, formally break faith with him - declaring he would no longer accept him as lord but would continue to keep the fief as his own demesne or take it to another lord who might accept him as vassal. Because the lord often regarded defiance as rebellion, defiant vassals had to have strong support or be prepared for a war they might lose.

E. Royal Authority

Monarchs during the feudal period had other sources of authority besides their feudal suzerainty. The renaissance of classical learning included the revival of Roman law, with its traditions of powerful rulers and territorial government. But the Christian view of authority prevented this power from becoming extreme; rulers were reminded that they were responsible for the welfare of their subjects, and for kind treatment. The resurgence of trade and industry brought into being towns and a powerful urban class that looked to princes to maintain the freedom and order required for business activities. These townspeople also demanded a role in government commensurate with their wealth. In Italy they organized communes that won control of the countryside from the feudal nobles and even forced them to live in some of the cities. North of the Alps the townspeople sent representatives to the monarchs' councils and developed parliamentary institutions to give them a voice in government equal to that of the feudality. With the taxes from the towns, the princes were able to hire civil servants and professional troops. Thus, they were able both to impose their will on the feudality and to make themselves largely independent of the service of their vassals.

IV DECLINE of Feudalism

During the 13th century feudalism reached the zenith of development and also began to decline. Subinfeudation had reached the point where superior lords had difficulty obtaining the service to which they were entitled. Vassals typically

preferred to give money payments - called scutage, or shield money - instead of personal military service to their lords, and the lords themselves tended to prefer the money because it enabled them to hire professional troops that were often better trained and disciplined than the vassals. Moreover, a revival of infantry tactics and the introduction of new weapons, such as the longbow and the pike, made cavalry tactics less certain of victory. In the 14th and 15th centuries the decline of feudalism accelerated. During the Hundred Years' War, the chivalry of France and England fought bravely and gloriously, but the battles were largely won by professional men-at-arms and especially by the archers on foot. The professionals fought in companies whose leaders took oaths of homage and fealty to a prince, but under contracts that were not hereditary and usually for a term of months or years. This "bastard feudalism" was but a step away from purely mercenary fighting, and in Italy the Renaissance *condottieri*, some of whom were Englishmen trained in transalpine war, had indeed made that transition.

V ROLE IN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The fief was embedded in the customary law of Western Europe, and the incidents of feudalism, such as wardship and marriage, escheat and forfeiture, continued to flourish after feudal military service died out. In England feudal tenures were abolished by statute in 1660, but they lingered on in parts of the Continent until the customary law was replaced by Roman law, a process completed by Napoleon. Roman law substituted other legal notions for feudal ones on the Continent, but in England the common law continued to be basically feudal law. Wherever English people settled in the modern era, they took their common law with them and thus established feudal principles all over the world. English constitutionalism is fundamentally feudal, based on the contract theory of government. When John Locke wrote his treatises on government in the 17th century, he was seeking to generalize for all persons the feudal contract that limited the rights of the suzerain over his vassals and retained for them the German warrior's independence. The U.S. Declaration of Independence was a classic act of feudal defiance, as the Continental Congress enumerated the tyrannical acts of the king and declared the colonists no longer bound by their allegiance to him. Nineteenth-century liberalism and 20th-century libertarianism owe their basic premises to feudalism. In sum, feudal ideas were important to the political development of Western civilization, reconciling authority with liberty by way of contract.

Manorialism - Seignorialism

I. INTRODUCTION to Manorialism and Seignorialism

Seignorialism, known in England as manorialism, was a system of political, economic, and social relations between seigneurs, or lords, and their dependent farm laborers in the middle Ages. In England, King Alfred (who reigned from 871 A.D. to 899 A.D.) decreed that every man should have a lord, and throughout medieval Western Europe seignorialism was the norm. Seignorialism is not to be confused with feudalism, which was a system of military and political relationships among the lords only.

II HISTORICAL ORIGINS of Manorialism and Seignorialism

In the Roman Empire agrarian life was increasingly dominated by the estates, or villas, of the landowners, who supervised the cultivation of their lands by slaves and former slaves. Some of these peasants were given their own sections of the estate to work and live on, but they remained dependent on the senior, the "old man"; even small freeholders became more and more dependent on their greater neighbors. Late in the 3rd century all cultivators of the soil were required by imperial edict to remain on their lands, along with their heirs after them, but in reciprocation they could not have their lands taken away from them, even if they were slaves. Under this system, the landowners exercised the power of *pater familias* over the *coloni*, or settlers on their lands, whether free or in bondage; they held economic power as landlords and supervisors of cultivation on the estate; and they often acquired political jurisdiction by grant or usurpation of immunity from the imperial government.

The estate might be as small as 16 hectares (40 acres), but it might also be hundreds of hectares in extent. Typically, in land of good quality, an estate comprised about 400 hectares (1000 acres). It centered on the big house (villa, hall, manor) of the owner, with its outbuildings - kitchens, bakery, brew house, workshops, stables, barns, and cellars. Domestic slaves might be housed in dormitories, but married slaves and free or freed laborers were commonly established in clustered quarters similar to those of antebellum plantations in the U.S. South. This cluster was called a village, although sometimes it was no bigger than a mere hamlet. The lands might be divided into those cultivated for the seigneur, others tilled for the sustenance of the peasants, and the meadows, pastures, woodlands, and wastelands that were not in cultivation but were needed for the nearly self-sustaining economy of the estate.

When the German invaders conquered the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century, they took over this system of estates with dependent cultivators. Outside

the Roman Empire - in England, Germany, and Scandinavia - seignorialism was introduced by the princes. Small freeholders continued to exist everywhere, but more and more of them found it desirable to "commend" themselves to the care of lords. The breakdown of strong central government in the 9th century accelerated the development of the seignury as the principal unit of political authority on the local level. Economic localism, in the absence of strong urban settlements and a market economy, also strengthened the economic control of the seigneur as the head of an agricultural unit of production and consumption. All the people under the jurisdiction and economic supervision of the seigneur tended to be assimilated into his family and treated as if they were his children: to be judged and punished by him, to be directed by him in their work, and to be under his care and protection. They were his serfs, to use the term that became common after the 10th century.

III THE SYSTEMS OF MANORIALISM AND SEIGNORIALISM IN PRACTICE

The years from 1000 to 1350 were the heyday of seignorialism. Throughout Western Europe, with variations from region to region, the seigneurs of the noble class dominated the lives of the peasants. The seigneurs had varying degrees of wealth and power, and their estates were of different sizes and degrees of compactness, but they were all rulers, employers, and patriarchs. The peasants might be either servile or free in personal status, but they were all the subjects and employees of the seigneurs. When the lord or his representative held court, all his peasants were required to attend, to bring their complaints before him, and to be judged for the offenses that were within the lord's authority. When the lord needed his lands plowed or his crops harvested, he had the right to his peasants' labor. By the 13th century his authority and his rights to labor were well defined in most seigneuries: He did or did not have the right to hang thieves, for example; and from each peasant holding he had the right to so many days' labor each week and so many extra days during plowing, harvest, and other special times. He might build gristmills, ovens, or winepresses and by his authority require his people to use them in order to increase his income. In general, he had the right to approve or disapprove the marriages of his people, to take a head tax from them annually, to tax their income at will, to take an inheritance tax at their deaths, and to reclaim their lands if they died without heirs. In return, the peasants, even those of servile origins, had the right to hold their land hereditarily, and although the lord might be able to give or sell them and their posterity, he then had to give or sell their lands with them. The peasants not only had certain strips of arable land in the fields of their villages, but they also had grazing rights on the common pastures and rights

to fuel and building materials in the common woods and wastelands, but usually no rights to any game or fish. The custom of the seigneurie was its law, declared in its courts with the peasants participating.

IV DECLINE AND END of Manorialism and Seigneurialism

The reappearance of a market economy in these same centuries weakened the economic basis of seigneurialism. The peasants were then able to sell excess products for money and to buy freedoms of various sorts from their lords. The lords were only too ready to sell these freedoms because the money enabled them to hire wage labor that was superior in discipline and frequently cheaper. The political power of the seigneurs was also undermined by the developing jurisdiction of strong princes, who tended to take into their own courts the cases of any who could pay enough. Even the system of two classes, lords and peasants, was undermined by the rising towns whose bourgeoisie were a middle class between the two, attracting recruits from both. The Black Death of the later Middle Ages administered the coup de grace to the seignorial system; labor then became so valuable that in order to keep their lands under cultivation and yielding revenue few lords could afford to refuse franchises to their peasants. In England few serfs survived by the 16th century, and the land was largely cultivated by yeoman freeholders or farmer leaseholders; the estates that were still intact were cultivated by wage labor. The lords remained socially dominant and often exerted patriarchal influence, but the peasants were legally free to change residence and employment. On the Continent changes came less rapidly. The seigneurie in France was abolished only with the French Revolution in 1789, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1848, and in Russia only in 1861.

V. CONCLUSION

Seigneurialism performed two roles in the history of Western civilization: First, seigneurialism provided a means of organizing an extremely localistic society in the Middle Ages; and second, it accomplished the homogenization of the bonded and the free labor of antiquity into a single class of peasants who, by the end of the Middle Ages, had acquired franchises and rights in their land.