



THE MIDDLE AGES NOTES

Unit 3: The Middle Ages

THE MIDDLE AGES

- The Middle Ages describes the period in European history from about the 400s through the 1400s
- The Middle Ages is sometimes called the “Dark Ages”
 - During this period, many Europeans converted to Christianity
 - Islam became a dominant religion in the southern Mediterranean
 - The political, ethnic, and linguistic borders of modern Europe were established at this time

THE FALL OF ROME, RISE OF GERMANIC TRIBES

- Rome was conquered by Germanic tribes in the 400s
 - These “barbarians” were loyal to their tribe
 - They divided the West Roman Empire into many kingdoms
 - They worked with Roman leaders to create governments that reflected the traditions of both groups

THE FALL OF ROME, RISE OF GERMANIC TRIBES

- Government in the Germanic kingdoms was on a much smaller scale than it was in the Roman Empire
 - Taxes had been a major source of government income during the Roman Empire
 - Germanic kings received money from the profits of their lands or from military conquest
 - Germanic governments did not have a large income and could not build roads or support schools

THE FALL OF ROME, RISE OF GERMANIC TRIBES

- Kings ruled their own lands and the rest was controlled by nobles
 - Nobles served as the king's warriors and were the major landowners of the time
 - In return for their loyalty, nobles expected the king to provide land, goods, or privileges

MANORIALISM

- By the 800s, most of western Europe was divided into large estates of land called **manors**
 - Wealthy landowners, called **landlords** or lords, ruled the manors
 - Peasants worked the land and often were forbidden from leaving it
 - Each village on a manor produced nearly everything it needed to survive
 - This system of obtaining a living from the land was called **manorialism**

MANORIALISM

- Towns lost their importance in manorial society
 - Most served only as centers of religious activity
 - The middle class, which had engaged in trade and industry, disappeared
 - Education, cultural activities, and literacy declined
 - Almost all state and city schools disappeared

FEUDALISM

- **Feudalism** describes the political and military system of western Europe during the Middle Ages
- Under feudalism, the noblemen who controlled the land also had political, economic, judicial, and military power

FEUDALISM

- Nobleman collected taxes and fines
 - Acted as judges in legal disputes
 - They maintained an army of knights within their own territory
 - They supervised the farming of the manors on his fief
 - These fief-holders were the ruling class in Europe for more than 400 years

FEUDALISM

- A typical member of the feudal ruling class was a nobleman, a knight, a vassal, and a lord
 - He was a nobleman because he had been born into the noble class
 - He became a knight when he decided to spend his life as a professional warrior

FEUDALISM

- He became a vassal when he promised to serve a king or other important person in return for a fief
- Finally, he became a lord when he gave part of his own land to persons who promised to serve him

FEUDALISM

- The **fief** was the estate or land granted by a lord in return for a vassal's loyalty and service
 - Some were large enough to support one knight
 - Others were provinces of a larger kingdom

FEUDALISM

- Vassals promised to be loyal and fight for the lord
 - In return, they had the right to use a fief and received what the land and the peasants produced
 - Vassals were able to collect taxes, administer justice, and manage the peasants' labor

FEUDALISM

- A vassal's main service to his lord was through the military
- By the 700s, vassals had to supply a certain number of knights to serve the lord
 - The larger the fief held by a vassal, the more knights the vassal had to provide
- It was also common for a vassal to divide his own fief and distribute parts of it to his knights
 - The knights then became his vassals

FEUDALISM

- The peasants had few rights and were almost completely at the will of their lords
- A peasant family worked together to farm both the lord's fields and their own
- Peasants had to pay many kinds of taxes, usually in the form of goods/crops

THE CHURCH DURING FEUDAL TIMES

- The church owned large fiefs and was a part of the feudal system
 - The power of the church became the force that bound Europe together during the feudal period
 - Many feudal lords gave fiefs to the church as donations or in return for services performed by the clergy

THE CHURCH DURING FEUDAL TIMES

- Church leaders were not a part of feudal warfare
- Their most powerful weapon against the lords was the threat of **excommunication**—this meant a person would be cut off completely from the church and this would take away the person's hope of going to heaven

DECLINE OF FEUDALISM

- By the 1200s feudalism began to decline
 - Fewer lords relied on vassals to provide the services of knights
 - The invention of gunpowder, the longbow, and the cannon lessened the dominance of knights
 - Cities grew wealthier and became more important
 - People trained in government service took over the functions that vassals had performed on their fiefs

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- A vertical decorative bar on the left side of the slide, featuring a series of overlapping, semi-transparent circles in shades of light green and beige, creating a layered, organic effect.
- Information courtesy of World Book Online Encyclopedia