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 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.

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
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**

- King
- Church Official
- Noble
- Knights
- Peasants

**Japanese Feudalism**

- Emperor
- Daimyo
- Samurai
- Artisans
- Merchants
- Peasants

**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?

2. **Forming and Supporting Opinions**
   - Today, does the United States have a system of social classes? Support your answer with evidence.
typically consisted of the lord’s manor house, a church, and workshops. Generally, 15 to 30 families lived in the village on a manor. Fields, pastures, and woodlands surrounded the village. Sometimes a stream wound through the manor. Streams and ponds provided fish, which served as an important source of food. The mill for grinding the grain was often located on the stream.

The manor was largely a self-sufficient community. The serfs and peasants raised or produced nearly everything that they and their lord needed for daily life—crops, milk and cheese, fuel, cloth, leather goods, and lumber. The only outside purchases were salt, iron, and a few unusual objects such as millstones. These were huge stones used to grind flour. Crops grown on the manor usually included grains, such as wheat, rye, barley, and oats, and vegetables, such as peas, beans, onions, and beets.

**The Harshness of Manor Life** For the privilege of living on the lord’s land, peasants paid a high price. They paid a tax on all grain ground in the lord’s mill. Any attempt to avoid taxes by baking bread elsewhere was treated as a crime. Peasants also paid a tax on marriage. Weddings could take place only with the lord’s

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Causes**

How might the decline of trade during the early Middle Ages have contributed to the self-sufficiency of the manor system?
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:

**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.