

# FEUDALISM: STUDENT'S BRIEF HISTORY

## TRANSITION FROM THE ROMAN EMPIRE TO THE MIDDLE AGES

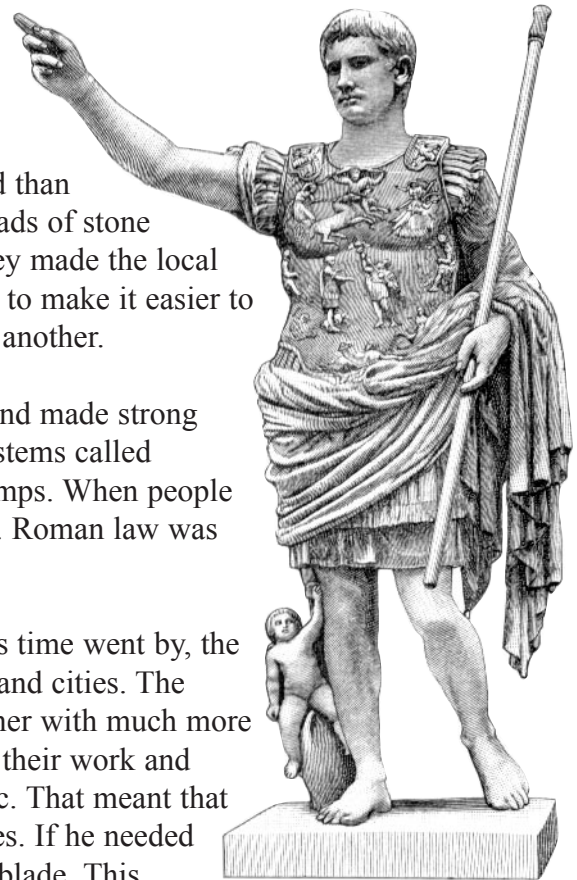
55 B.C. When the Emperor Julius Caesar sent his vast armies north all the way to Britain, they found savage people gathered into tiny villages, and vast areas of wilderness and wasteland.



The Romans were much more civilized than these people. The Romans designed roads of stone and sometimes pieces of metal, and they made the local people build them. Romans built roads to make it easier to move many soldiers from one place to another.

They also built many fortified camps and made strong buildings of wood and stone. In some places they built water systems called aqueducts. They allowed travelers and traders to stay in their camps. When people did bad things, Roman law was used to decide their punishment. Roman law was usually more fair than the savage way, “an eye for and eye. . .”

The Romans ruled a large part of Europe for about 500 years. As time went by, the Roman's fortified camps grew into villages and then into towns and cities. The Romans introduced new farming methods that provided the farmer with much more produce. There was a surplus of food, so some farmers changed their work and become specialized at being carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, etc. That meant that the farmer and his family didn't have to do everything themselves. If he needed a new plow blade he could trade food with the blacksmith for a blade. This specialization made life easier for everyone.



**JULIUS CAESAR**

## MANORIALISM IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The Romans brought their form of law and order to the lands they conquered. Roman law gave different rights to different groups of people. Nobles and the wealthy had many more rights than the peasant. The Roman soldiers enforced the law and protected the peasants. Farmers felt safe taking their produce to markets. Traders were not robbed when they carried jewelry or expensive items from town to town.



**THE TOWN OF ARLES  
WAS SHAPED LIKE AN  
AMPHITHEATER.**

### *Manorialism and Serfs*

When the Roman Empire fell and the Roman soldiers left, life changed. There was no one to enforce laws and keep order. Farmers and traders were no longer safe. Roads and buildings were not repaired. No one punished offenders. Crime was terrible. People left the cities and scattered throughout the countryside. Farmers and their families were enslaved by the barbarians. The cities and villages mostly disappeared. Farmers and their families were enslaved by the barbarians. The cities and villages the Romans helped build mostly disappeared.

When the Roman Empire was strong, they had a way for poor and defenseless

land owners to protect themselves against marauders and barbarians. The weak person could give his land to a powerful lord and in return the weak person would get protection from marauders. After the Roman army was gone, many people gave their land away to wealthy people who promised to protect them. Their land became part of the powerful person's manor. The weak person and his family became serfs. This economic system of a serf binding himself and his family to a lord in return for protection is called manorialism.

As the Middle Ages progressed and the villages grew, people needed to protect themselves. Some of their villages looked like the town of Arles on the left. It was much easier to protect a walled city than one that was spread out.

### ***Serfs and Villeins***

There were different types of serfs. The lowest only had a few acres of land to work and were very poor. Their jobs on the manor were the worse. But most peasants were called villeins, from the word villa or farm. A villein usually had 40 acres of land and had special rights. The villein could draw water from the lord's streams and gather wood in the lord's forests. In exchange for the land and protection from marauders, the villein worked a certain number of days a week on the lord's land and had to supply the lord with produce, meat, wine and cloth.

All serfs and villeins were required to do both field-work, like plowing and handwork, like ditch digging, tree cutting and road building. He was also required to do "boon" work that showed his gratitude to the lord for his protection.

Highest on the peasant social scale was the freedman. He usually had inherited land or a larger farm. Some were skilled in a craft and others were tradesmen who traveled and sold their good to others. He had to pay taxes also, but usually less. He also had special rights that protected him and his family.

The lord could make the serf, villein and freedman pay a variety of taxes, like a head tax, income tax, payments to use the manor's ovens, mill and wine press. He could even make a serf pay for the right to marry a girl from another manor. A serf wasn't actually a slave and could escape his servitude by moving to a town and paying taxes to the town for one full year. He could sometimes buy his freedom from the lord, because nobles were always out of money. However it was very difficult for a serf to put aside enough money to buy his freedom.



**PAYING TAXES TO THE LORD.**



### **FEUDALISM IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

Medieval society had a deep sense of duty, and it was the duty of the peasant or villein to serve the clergy and nobles. The relationship and responsibilities between serf and nobility on the manor was called manorialism. This should not be confused with feudalism. The relationship between noble and noble was called feudalism.

The Frankish people developed the custom, similar to a Roman custom, of having armed companions accompany the king and queen wherever they went and fight for them against their enemies. In return for this service, the king would take care of these companions and protect them. Some of these armed companions were called vassals. To be a vassal was a great honor. To become a vassal, you first had to be of the nobility.

## ***Chivalry and Knighthood***

Knighthood was a military order. Knights were trained fighting men and much more. To be a knight, a man had to be willing to live by the Code of Chivalry. Chivalry was a set of values, principles and behavior that all knights were obligated to live by. They pledged to protect the Church, to defend females, the weak and oppressed, to act with courage, live with honesty and treat everyone fairly.

When chivalry became established, all the sons of nobility, except those headed for the Church, were trained to be knights. The sons of poorer nobles were usually placed in the family of a wealthy lord to be trained in the duties and exercises of knighthood. This education began at the age of seven. The youth would act as a page until he was fourteen. At fourteen he was given the title of squire or esquire. The lord and his knights trained the boys on manly duties and martial skills. The ladies of the castle instructed them on the duties of religion and in all knightly etiquette. The esquire always went to battle with the knight to whom he was attached. He carried the knight's weapons and fought in battle if his knight was in great danger of being killed.

## ***The Ceremony of Knighting***

At the age of 21 the squire was introduced to the order of knighthood through an impressive ceremony. After fasting and conducting a long vigil, the candidate listened to a long sermon on his duties as a knight. Then he knelt, as in the feudal ceremony, before the lord conducting the services. He vowed to defend the Church and the ladies, to take care of those in need, and to always be faithful to his companion knights.



**A PAINTING BY RAPHAEL  
SHOWING A KNIGHT, SCIPIO,  
TORN BETWEEN ATHENA OF  
FAME AND APHRODITE OF  
LOVE.**

His weapons were then given to him and his sword was girded on. The lord, striking him with the flat of his sword on the shoulders, said, "In the name of God, St. Michael, and of St. George, I dub thee knight; be brave, bold and loyal."

## ***The Good of Chivalry***

Chivalry contributed powerfully to the development of respect and admiration of females. Up until this time, women were treated much like any other possession. It also created that "ideal of character" by requiring that knights live by the values of courtesy, gentleness, humanity, loyalty, magnanimity, and fidelity to the pledged word. These were people who tried to live virtuous lives. Chivalry gave the world an ideal of manhood and a set of values to use to guide their behavior.