

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF FEUDALISM

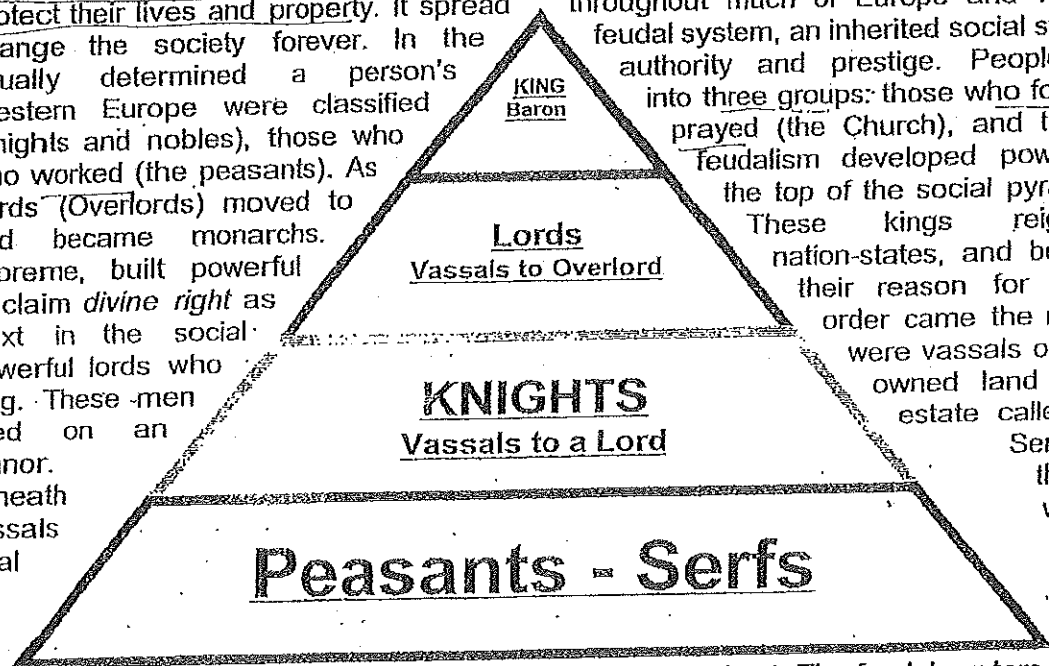
Instructions: As you read about the development of feudalism in Europe, fill out the chart by writing notes in the appropriate spaces.



<p>Describe feudal social classes.</p>	
<p>Explain the mutual obligations of the feudal system.</p>	
<p>Describe the life of a peasant.</p>	
<p>Describe the process of becoming a knight.</p>	
<p>Describe the invading peoples that caused turmoil in Europe during the 800's.</p>	

Feudalism

After the death of Charlemagne in 814, central authority broke down in Western Europe. Europe became a battleground as waves of new invaders attacked repeatedly. The invasions of Muslims, Magyars, and Vikings caused widespread destruction and disorder in Western Europe. The Muslims struck from the south. They were excellent sailors who controlled the Mediterranean Sea. The Magyars were nomads who attacked from the east. They were superior horseback riders who captured people to sell as slaves. Of all three invaders, the Vikings were the most dreaded of all. These Germanic people from Scandinavia were also called Norseman. They were vicious invaders who were also skillful seafarers. Western Europeans were powerless and lived in constant fear. With no central authority and a lack of strong rulers, people developed feudalism as a way to protect their lives and property. It spread throughout much of Europe and would change the society forever. In the feudal system, an inherited social status usually determined a person's authority and prestige. People in Western Europe were classified into three groups: those who fought (knights and nobles), those who prayed (the Church), and those who worked (the peasants). As feudalism developed powerful Lords (Overlords) moved to the top of the social pyramid and became monarchs. These kings reigned supreme, built powerful nation-states, and began to claim *divine right* as their reason for rule. Next in the social order came the most powerful lords who were vassals of the king. These men owned land and lived on an estate called a manor. Serving these vassals beneath these were loyal vassals.



warriors called knights who pledged to defend their lord's land. The feudal system was based on mutual obligations, and the exchange of land for protection and services. In exchange for military protection, a landowner granted land-called a fief- to a vassal. Vassals were the people receiving the fief. They used highly trained knights to defend their land in exchange for fiefs. As the lord's vassal, a knight's main obligation was to serve in battle. The standards and training of a knight were intense. To become a chivalrous knight, a young boy began training in the castle of another lord at age seven. At age fourteen, the boy would be raised to the rank of a knight's apprentice or a squire. At age twenty-one, a squire became a full fledged knight. At the base of the pyramid were peasants who were also called serfs. Peasants tended the lord's land, cared for his animals, and maintained the estate in exchange for protection and farmland. Life was extremely harsh for a peasant. They toiled in the fields enduring backbreaking labor and lived in one room crowded cottages with their farm animals. They were also required to tithe one-tenth of their income to a priest. Despite these hardships, serfs believed that God determined a person's place in society and usually accepted their plight. The Roman Catholic Church usually supported this social structure and in fact, many bishops and church leaders were vassals of an overlord and had knights that served them.