

Fief

A Look at Medieval Society from Its Lower Rungs
by Lisa J. Steele



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A Word From The Publisher



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa J. Steele is a criminal defense attorney and author based in Massachusetts. She represents clients accused of crimes ranging from minor traffic offenses to capital murder. Ms. Steele has been a game player and designer for at least 15 years. She is the author of *GURPS Cops* (forthcoming from Steve Jackson Games), White Rose's *Medieval France* (unfortunately out of print), and a variety of articles in various gaming magazines and legal periodicals. Her personal interests range from science fiction to economics to medieval history to firearms.

Fief Version 1.0

If you're like most readers, this is your first encounter with *Fief*, Lisa Steele's primer on medieval life for fantasy gamers, SCA enthusiasts, and others interested in knowing what made society tick in the days of crusading knights and the Black Plague.

This is, however, a new, revised edition of what amounts to an "underground classic" of gaming – the kind of book that's a jealously-guarded secret of those few who've managed to locate it. The first edition, a tape-bound book published by White Rose Publishing, appeared quietly, five years ago, distributed with elbow grease and affection. I knew Lisa in those days from our mutual involvement in the fan press, which made me one of the lucky handful aware of White Rose. Most gamers had never heard of the little New England company, and still haven't.

Now, I'm in the happy position of being able to share that secret, putting an excellent tool into the hands of Game Masters all over the globe.

Lisa's work feels right at home at Cumberland. Like any other title in the All-Systems Library, *Fief* is rules-independent, focusing entirely on details that will open your eyes and fuel your imagination, unencumbered by game-speak. That makes room for a lot of detail, and Lisa doesn't skimp on the servings. *Fief* is a feast, and everyone from the casual fantasy gamer to the seasoned medievalist will find something worthy to chew on. My own contribution, exclusive to this edition, is a new index with over 1,300 entries. It says more about how much *stuff* this book contains than any praise I can heap on it here. Enjoy.



A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "G. Schirfoss". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "G".

Austin, Texas, November 2001

too long, the harvest could be disrupted and people would starve. That risk was a powerful motivation for landholders, their lieges, and clergy to act conservatively and maintain custom.

There were many threats to each element of the system. The major threats to the fief came from the landholder's superiors, who might challenge his or her right to hold the land, and from potential heirs who might try to win their inheritance prematurely. The major threats to the manor came from warfare, brigandage, farmer unrest, and bad weather. The major threats to the parish came from its superiors, who might despoil its tithes and appoint unqualified priests, and from its priest himself, who might prove incompetent or greedy. There were also secular landholders who tried to claim church lands or impose their own candidates on the local bishop.



MONEY

Fief lists figures in the standard units of *livre*, *sou*, and *denier*. In many places, the *livre* was not an actual coin; it was an accounting notation, equal to 20 *sou* or 240 *denier*. In practice, coins varied in worth depending on their metal content and their scarcity. All of the values given in *Fief* have been translated into the *livre tournois* (French) or *livre Angevin* (English), which had basically the same value. France had a number of different *livre*, each named for the city where it was minted and having different values. England kept records in the pound sterling (worth about $\frac{1}{4}$ *livre*) and the silver mark (worth about $13 \frac{1}{3}$ *sou*). France and England experienced a wave of coinage debasement in 14-15C caused, in part, by a shortage of gold and silver and, in part, by the expenses of the Hundred Years War. The English monarchs had a more effective royal tax system than the French and did not need to debase their coin just to pay for the war. The English penny's weight and silver content remained unchanged (92.5% silver) weighing roughly $\frac{1}{240}$ lb.) from 1279-1344. It was reduced by less than $\frac{1}{5}$ th from 1344-51. In 1412, it was reduced by another $\frac{1}{6}$ th. In 1464, it was reduced by another $\frac{1}{5}$ th, and remained constant until 1526.

TERMS

The following is a list of various terms and how they are used in *Fief*. Historical sources and academics use some of these terms in different ways. Where actual records are quoted, the meaning should be clear from the context.

Acre - As a modern measure, 43,560 square feet. The medieval acre was only half to two-thirds the size of the modern acre.

Boon Work - Special employment due from serfs on the landholder's fields, notably ploughing, sowing, harrowing, and harvesting.

Bovate - Measure of land averaging 15 medieval acres.

Bushel - As a modern measure, 8 gallons or $1\frac{1}{4}$ cubic feet. The medieval bushel was based on a customary container and might vary widely in size.

Culture - A division of land, about 8-10 acres.

Demesne - Fields owned directly by the landholder and worked by tenants on his or her behalf.

Farmers - The people who actually work the land, used to collectively refer to both peasants and serfs.

Hide - A division of land, equal to 60 to 120 acres.

Landholder - The noble or aristocrat who holds legal title to the land. It is possible for more than one landholder to control a given manor.

Peasant - A free farmer with some enforceable rights against the landholder.

Quarter - Measure of grain equal to 8 bushels, or 32 pecks, or 64 gallons.

Serf - An unfree farmer with limited rights against the landholder. A serf's status was somewhere between a slave and a sharecropper or tenant farmer. Serfdom reached its height in 12C and had all but vanished by 15-16C.

Sheaf - Unit of grain equal to $\frac{1}{10}$ bushel.

Tun - Unit of grain equal to 4 quarters

Venison - Often used to refer to the four major forest game animals: fallow deer, red deer, roe, and wild boar.

Vergate - Measure of land averaging 30-32 medieval acres.

Vert - Often used to refer to trees, underbrush, and forest plants needed to shelter and feed game animals.

Villein - English word for an unfree farmer. *Villain* is a French word for a free farmer.

Week Work - Weekly labor required from serfs on the landholder's fields.

FARNHAM'S CASTLE

Farnham had a motte and bailey castle. Its stone keep contained a soldiers' barracks, well, armory, and stores. It was protected by a ditch and a removable bridge. Until 13C, the ditch was surrounded by two rows of hedges. The inner one protected the bailey, the outer one kept cattle from falling into the ditch. The ditches were full of nettles and thorns which were trimmed every year.

In 13C, Farnham gained an outer stone wall, three turrets, a square tower, a round tower, and two gates. The towers were all roofed with tiles. The main gatehouse and keep were roofed with lead sheets. The gate house had a drawbridge of sorts, but it wasn't very sturdy. In 1251, it broke beneath the weight of some carts. It was rebuilt in 1288. In the meantime, a temporary or removable bridge was used.

The major buildings inside the walls included a hall, chapel, kitchen, and landholder's chamber. Each was a stone building connected by wooden passages. The main hall was protected by its own dry moat, gatehouse, and drawbridge. It measured 66' x 43' with four narrow windows on each long wall. These were protected by iron bars and shutters. It had a timber roof with a hole in it for smoke.

Doors led from the hall to the kitchen, buttery, pantry, chapel, and landholder's room. It also had small chambers for the landholder's four household officials, plus a treasury and a study. The hall was furnished with a cupboard, tables, and benches. At night, it was lighted with wax candles in iron holders. For formal dinners, the tables were covered with linen and the walls hung with tapestries. Hay was scattered on the floor. (When the landholder wasn't present, hog carcasses were hung in the hall after slaughtering.)

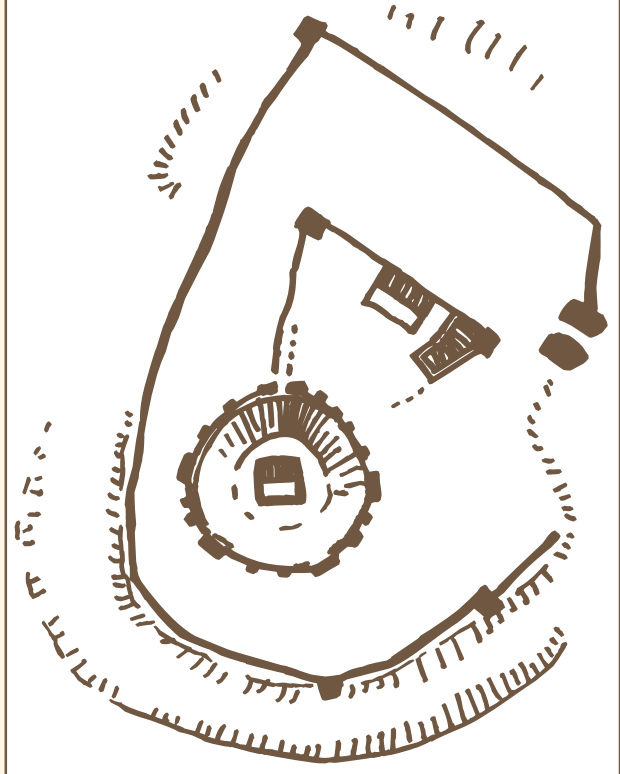
The kitchen was attached to the buttery (where butter and cheese were made and stored) and a pantry. It had eleven windows, protected again by iron bars and wooden shutters, and an opening in the roof for smoke and steam. It also had two fireplaces for cooking, tables, a few brass pots, a boiling pan, and a few brass utensils.

Castle chapels became increasingly common starting in 13C. The chapel had an altar on a stone platform, a few glazed windows, a reading pulpit, benches, and a small belfry. There was a small vestry where books and vestments were stored when the landholder was in residence. When the landholder visited, he brought the vestments, altar linens, hangings, and sacred vessels with him. In 14C, Farnham gained two more chapels, one near the keep and another near the landholder's quarters. The chapel was used for daily worship, but not for greater church feasts and masses.

A steep narrow stair led to the landholder's chamber. The stairs were easily defended and the windows were again protected by iron bars. It had tables, benches, and a bed. Bedding was part of the landholder's traveling luggage.

The bailey had a group of wooden buildings, including a bakery, brew house, dairy, dovecot, dyer's house, kennels, mews, stable, and smithy.

FARNHAM, 13C



III. Agriculture

A manor existed to produce enough grain to feed its farmers and landholder, and provide a surplus which could be bartered for needed imports. The smallest manor would provide just enough surplus to feed one or more warhorses and barter for armor and weapons.

There was a constant tension on the manor between diminishing returns from depleted fields, and increased productivity from improved agricultural knowledge and techniques. Overall, by 11C, manors were able to feed an increasing population of townspeople, clergy, and nobles.

One of the basic concepts of manorial agriculture is that a farmer's labor is divided between his or her family's land and the landholder's. Land was divided into fields and then into strips. The landholder's, church's, and farmers' strips were all intermingled. Agricultural decisions had to be made collectively, often by the farmers rather than the landholder.

Medieval agriculture was inherently conservative. The landholder's goal was to maintain yields and livestock without excessive waste. He or she was rarely entitled to a share of the farmers' products and did not have an interest in taking risks that might improve overall yields. The Church's income was based on a fixed percentage of gross yields, so it had an incentive to improve yields. Moreover, a monastic order had the resources to risk crop failure in experimenting with new technology and techniques on its own lands. Farmers, of course, needed improved yields to improve their standard of living, but were limited by the need for village consensus on basic decisions like when to start planting and what fields to leave fallow.

SOIL

Soil varied widely depending on where a manor was located. Northern Europe, in general, has heavier soil than southern Europe, but soil types varied even within a manor. The soil's composition affected the plow and plow team used.

Wheeled plows work well in light soil but get clogged in heavy soil. Foot plows work well in heavy soil, but are slow and cumbersome in light soil. Swing plows or hook plows were used on stiff, heavy soil or on very uneven ground since the smaller ploughshare was less impeded by obstacles like roots and stones. The furrow made by a hook plow was also smaller, causing less evaporation in Mediterranean climates.

Different plows were used at different times of the year. The soil was damper in the winter, so foot plows were used for winter plowing. In the drier summer, wheel plows were preferred.

A manor's soil also affected the choice of crops. The major crops were wheat, oats, barley, beans, peas and various vegetables. Other crops included flax and hemp. Flax thrives in shallow, chalky, humid soils. Hemp, used for rope, thrives on deep, rich, wet soil. Both flax and hemp rapidly exhaust soil, however. In north-

ern Italy, crops included the usual wheat, rye, and millet (a kind of grain), but also cabbages, cauliflowers, garlic, pumpkin, melons, onions, and turnips.

Farmers valued soil that could retain its minerals. They preferred soil with a medium amount of clay. Light loam was less popular. Wetlands, fens,



ratios of ten to eleven times what is sown, but did not reach the modern upper yields of twenty times what is sown.

STORAGE

Grain was stored in wooden barns for the winter. When barns were not available, grain was stored in ricks set on stone or iron saddles. Under optimum conditions, if grain is kept dry, protected from weevils and rodents, turned every six months, and riddled (pierced to aerate the grain) every month, it might keep for 2 to 4 years. In most years, however, grain was used within the year after it was harvested.

Meat and fish were salted. Either could be kept “dry” salted (stored in beds of salt) or “brine” salted (stored in casks of salt water). Every 100 pounds of beef or lamb needs about 8 pounds of salt to preserve it; 100 pounds of pork needs 7 pounds. Fish requires about 25 pounds of salt per 100 pounds of fish. Salted meat and fish is generally edible for 9 to 12 months.

FAMINE AND FAILED HARVESTS

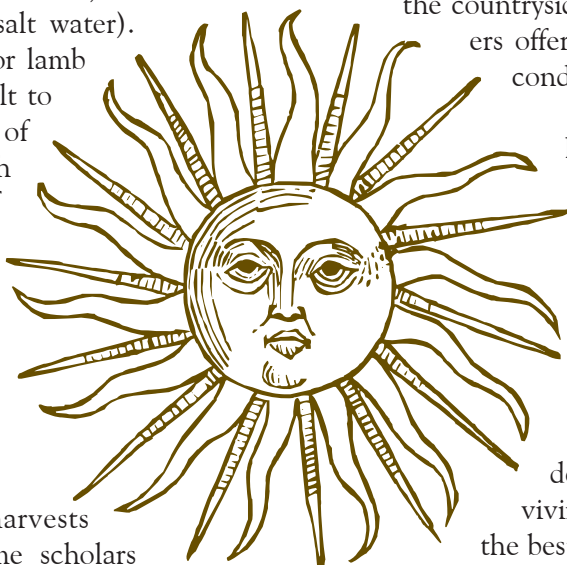
Famines and failed harvests were a constant risk. Some scholars believe that by early 14C, Europe’s population had reached the limits of its agricultural technology – manors were farming all of the available arable land, but harvests were meager and nutrition poor.

England’s worst harvest of the 13C was in 1258. In 14C, heavy rains caused successive harvest failures in 1314-1316. This second famine affected most of Europe, causing starvation and death on a massive scale. Prices soared. Stores vanished. Rumors held that the poor ate cats, dogs, and even babies stolen from neighbors. As people killed and ate unhealthy animals and rotting stores, epidemics added to the death toll. The famine was combined with murrain in 1318 that killed sheep and plow animals. Whole villages were completely depopulated as a result of the heavy death toll. Three decades later, the Black Death, or Great Plague, continued the destruction the famines had begun.

In southern England, the wheat harvest in 1315 was 60% of average; barley was 80% of average; and oats were 89% of average. In northern England, the wheat harvest was 28% of average; barley was 41% of average; and oats were 64% of average. The next year, the wheat harvest in southern England was 53% of average; barley 68% of average; and oats 71% of average. The northern England wheat harvest was 11½% of average; barley 71% of average; and oats 80% of average.

Prices reflected the disaster. In fall 1315, wheat was 8 s per quarter. In summer 1316, wheat was 26 s, 89 d per quarter. Barley was 16 s per quarter. Salt in 1300 was 3 s per quarter. By 1316-17, it reached 11 s per quarter. Prices were a third lower in parts of the countryside. To stave off disaster, landholders offered grants of protection and safe-conduct to cross-country trade.

An estimated 10% of the population of England died in the 1314-16 famine. An estimated one-third to one-half of England’s population died as a result of the 1348-49 Plague. The climate changed for the worse during the 14C, leading to an era of low temperatures called the “Little Ice Age”, which further decreased yields. The smaller surviving population increased its use of the best arable lands.



INVENTIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Agricultural knowledge and techniques improved continuously from 6C to 15C. In 6C, the heavy plow, harrow, padded horse collar, and tandem harness together made it easier to grow grain in northern Europe. The scythe made harvests more efficient. In 9C, iron horse shoes made horses even more productive in the fields and in battle. The rotary grindstone replaced hand mills. In 12C, farmers discovered the artesian well, which made it easier to draw water from deep underground. The wheelbarrow first appeared in fields. The 13C brought spinning wheels and an improved cloth loom. In 14C, builders discovered the screw jack. The 15C brought an improved spindle and treadle for the spinning wheel.

IV. Forests and Waste Lands

The King to the sheriff of Gloucestershire greetings. Summon by good summoners the archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors, earls, barons, knights, and all free tenants having lands or tenements within the metes of our forest in your jurisdiction, and from each vill of your country being within the metes of our forest four men and the reeve and the foresters of the vills, and all others who are wont and ought to come before our justices for the pleas of our forest, that they be at Gloucester in the octave of St. Hilary next coming before our beloved and liege Luke de Tany, Adam Gurdon, Richard de Crepping and Peter de Lenche whom we constitute our justices in eyre for this turn for the pleas of the forest in the said county to hear and do what we command touching those things which belong to the aforesaid pleas . . .

– Writ of Edward I (1281)

Most manors were bordered by marshes, fens, or forests. These provided wood for building and cooking, small game for meat, and land that could be cleared for fields. In England, many forests were claimed by the monarchy for hunting. William I was said to love stags as if he were their father.

Forests provided game including boar, deer, fox, and wolves. They provided wood for fires, buildings, siege engines, and ships. Often farmers and clergy had the right to take wood from the landholder's forests to repair houses, hedges, carts, and tools (*estover*). To protect the forest and provide fodder for its beasts, farmers were often limited to taking only fallen wood and dead branches. Some farmers paid a *pannage* fee to feed their pigs in the forest. Until styes became common in 14-15C, the forests were often full of herds of semi-wild pigs. If a farmer exceeded customary or granted rights, he or she was fined for waste until the damaged wood or brush began to regrow. Forests might also be home to iron and coal miners and their associated forgers and smelters, as well as charcoal burners, smugglers, poachers, and bandits.

Those who had rights over the forest had to prevent over hunting and over-harvesting. Despite strict French forest laws, France lost ½ of its forests between 6C and 14C. Landholders who bordered other landholders' forests and royal forests constantly argued over the extent of the forest and just what

was included in their customary rights.

The English royal forests are discussed below. In France, counts claimed more control over the forests. In 14C, Enguerrand de Coucy hanged three Flanders nobles for hunting in his forests without permission. The French king imprisoned de Coucy and refused to release him until he promised to pay a 10,000 livre fine and go on a pilgrimage to Palestine.

ENGLISH ROYAL FORESTS

The Saxon and Norman monarchs established England's royal forests. These included not just woodland, but pastures, fields, even villages. Royal forests were subject to their own laws and courts – hunting and harming venison without royal permission was strictly forbidden, as was harming any trees, undergrowth, and plants that might serve as fodder or cover for game.

The basic administrative structure for the English royal forests was: (1) the chief justices of the forests (one for those north of the Trent river; one for those south of it); (2) itinerant justices (justices-in-eyre); (3) a warden who was also often the constable of a nearby castle; and (4) local foresters-of-fee.

Each forest also had its *agisters* (money collectors). The Sheriff of the county also had some responsibility for the forest, and appointed *regardors* (knights to investigate encroachments) and supervised the election of *verderers* (freeholders elected to guard the animals and oversee estovers).

At the manor level, the most important officials were the foresters-of-fee. The forester was appointed by the itinerant justices with the warden's approval; in practice, the office was all but hereditary. Each forester had charge of a *bailiwick* (forest district) and held some land associated with the office. The forester's job was to manage the forest and to track down poachers and criminals living in it.

SAMPLE PENANCES

Abortion, 39 or fewer days from conception	1 year
Abortion, 40+ days from conception	3 years
Adultery	1 year
Baptism, allowing child to die unbaptized	1 year
Bathing with someone of other sex	1 year
Bestiality, offender under 15	40 days, animal killed
Bestiality, offender under 20	15 years, animal killed
Bestiality, married offender over 20	20 years, animal killed
Bestiality, married offender over 50	No communion until deathbed, animal killed
Bigamy with 2nd spouse	1 year
Bigamy with 3+ spouses	7 years
Burglary	3 years, one of which on bread and water
Celebrating Passover with Jews	Driven from Church
Communion, knowingly giving to heretics or Jews	10 years
Conjuring storms	7 years
Cross dressing	3 years
Cursing	1 week plus apologize to target
Divination, performing	5 years
Drunkenness of priest	2 months
Drunkenness, until vomiting	15 days
Eating or drinking beside pagan sacred places; knowing	two 40-day periods
Eating or drinking beside pagan sacred places; unknowing	40 days on bread and water
Eating unclean flesh or carrion unless necessary to prevent starving	40 days
Embezzlement, church funds	3 years plus restitution
Embezzlement, money for poor	3 years plus restitution
Fornication by a bishop	13 years plus lose rank
Fornication, desire but unable to do so	40 days
Fornication with parent	3 years
Fornication with virgin	1 year plus fine paid to parent
Fraud by bishop	13 years plus lose rank
Fraud with false weights and measure	20 days on bread and water
Giving "serious" sacrifices to demons	10 years
Giving "trivial" sacrifices to demons	1 year
Gluttony, until vomiting	3 days
"Guiding" (teaching/leading) the barbarians if any Christian is thereby killed	Penance for life
"Guiding" the barbarians if no Christian is thereby killed	14 years
Heresy by baptized Christian	12 years
Homosexual acts between women	3 years
Homosexual acts between men, if frequent	10-15 years
Homosexual acts between men, if infrequent	3 years

CLERGY

Despite the sheer number of clergy in medieval Europe (2-3% of 13C England), a small manor was likely part of a larger parish and so would not have its own resident priest. The average parish had 4 to 5 male clergy to tend its 300 parishioners. These usually resided together at a collegiate church and rarely traveled to the outlying villages. Even if the village had its own church, many priests did not reside on their parish. Many collected the *benefice* (fee) of the parish and hired a lesser cleric to actually tend it. Other clergy held more than one benefice and again hired a lesser cleric to tend their various parishes.

Most priests were “Mass” priests – they lived near urban areas and said masses on behalf of the dead for a small fee (4 *d* to 5 *s*). The parish priest was often born of a small landholder or peasant family within the parish. Priests were allowed to marry until 12C; married priests were found well into 13C.

Clerical celibacy was first mandated by Gregory VII in 1074, but sporadically enforced. Some parishioners preferred a married advisor who understood their problems; others disliked supporting the priest’s family and feared that the role would become hereditary.

A resident priest might be assisted by a boy who performed household chores and a female housekeeper. After 13C, he might be assisted by churchwardens, who were elected from the parishioners to manage the building, vestments, and vessels in return for a small stipend.

Why did anyone seek ordination? No matter how illiterate the cleric, no matter how poor the parish, a priest had status. All clergy had benefit of ecclesiastical law for any crime other than misdemeanors or high treason. In general, clergy could expect more lenient treatment from their own courts than from civil authorities. Low-born clergy had a greater opportunity for advancement and a greater chance for salvation than their secular relatives.

The parish priest had several responsibilities. First, he was expected to teach parishioners about their faith, correct their sins, prevent heresy, and perform the sacraments. He baptized babies and told parents how to perform an emergency baptism if he were not present for the birth; arranged children’s confirmation; cared for the sick; buried the dead; and said the appropriate masses.

By 14C, he was expected to expound on the 14 articles of the faith, the seven sacraments (see pg. 43), the seven works of mercy (corporal: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, harbor strangers, visit the sick, minister to prisoners, and bury the dead; spiritual: convert sinners, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive injuries, and pray for the living and the dead), the seven virtues (faith, hope, charity, justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude), the ten commandments of the Old Testament and the two commandments of the Gospel, and the seven sins (pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth).



The priest was also expected to give charity to the poor and hospitality to travelers. The parish expected him to provide supernatural protection against natural disasters. Excommunication rituals were used to kill eels in lakes, banish sparrows from a church, and destroy pests like caterpillars and “palmer worms.”

Statues of saints and relics were carried into the fields to summon rain, banish hail, and slay insects. The priest blessed the fields, animals, and harvest alike. Church bells were rung to disperse storms and scatter demons. Landholders and farmers alike looked to the church to ward off famine and plague.

corrupt officials. Their only explanation for rapacious royal officials was that the king was being deceived by sycophants at court. Thus, when peasants revolted, they often hoped the crown would make a personal appearance and set right the wrongs done them.

The landholder's liege had a powerful influence. The liege might be the crown, an intermediate landholder, a cleric, or a city or town. The liege had two powerful rights – to compel the landholder to attend his or her court, and to demand hospitality when visiting. A landholder was often called to court to advise his or her liege, to witness important events, or merely to be evaluated. Lieges visited frequently to see how a manor was managed, to listen to complaints, and to reduce their household expenses by living off the landholder's supplies.

The medieval bishop was responsible for ordaining and overseeing each parish within his diocese. Bishops were divided into the "Ordinary," who were more concerned with royal administration, and the "Suffragan," who were responsible for the bishop's sacramental duties. A diocese usually had 2-6 suffragan bishops. A bishop often delegated his tasks to various aides, including the *archdeacon* (charged with collecting the bishop's share of tithes, often given a defined geographic region to administer), *archpriest* (later *dean*) (ceremonial), *chancellor* (private secretary, head of cathedral school, library, and archives, judge of cases not handled by archdeacons and appeals from archdeacon's decisions), *vicar forane* (later *rural dean*) (regional administrative and investigative), and *vicar general* (Pre-13C, special confessor for sins only a bishop can absolve. Post 13C, the bishop's deputy able to exercise ordinary jurisdiction as if he were the bishop). Of the above, the archdeacon is most likely to actually visit parishes, investigate matters there, perform confirmations, examine priests, and ordain them.

Until 11C, bishops were usually elected by lay leaders in their community. In 11C, the cathedral chapter began to elect the bishop. In practice, the bishop was usually chosen from a list of nominees

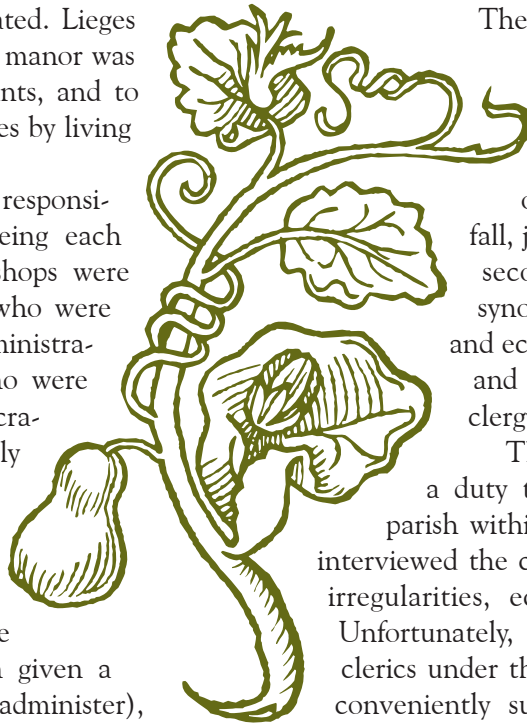
drafted by powerful nobles or the crown. The Chapter of Salisbury was once arrested when it failed to elect the king's candidate. A papal legate intervened to prevent the chapter from being charged with treason. The candidate was elected on a second ballot.

The involvement of nobles in choosing bishops led to an investiture conflict between Pope Gregory VIII and Emperor Henry of the Holy Roman Empire. In England, the pope appointed the bishop of Worcester. All other bishops were appointed by the crown. No other European kingdom had the same power over its bishops.

The bishop had the right to compel all the clergy in his diocese to attend his annual synod. Some allowed clergy to pay a fee of 1-2 s to avoid the trip. Most bishops held their synods in the early fall, just after the harvest. A few held a second session in the spring. The synod provided an occasion where civil and ecclesiastical lawsuits could be heard and settled, reforms announced, and clergy educated.

The local bishop, theoretically, had a duty to make an annual visit to each parish within his diocese. On these visits, he interviewed the clergy and parishioners looking for irregularities, ecclesiastical crimes, and so on. Unfortunately, most bishops had 2,000 to 3,000 clerics under their care, and diocese too large to conveniently supervise. Bishops delegated their investigatory duty to an archdeacon or rural dean. If the manor's church was a proprietary one, it was subject to the rural archpriest of the local baptismal church. The rural archpriest had many of the powers of a petty bishop and had a duty to visit each church to say mass on the feast of its patron saint.

A bishop's visit was a significant strain on a parish's supplies. He could arrive with 30 to 40 servants and their horses, all of which needed shelter and food. The Third Lateran Council (1179) recognized this problem and suggested limits. An archbishop could only demand hospitality for himself and 50 others. A bishop could bring a retinue of 30. An archdean was limited to 7 and a dean to 2. There didn't seem to be any formal limit on how long the visit could last, however.



IX. Society

The manor was the heart of medieval society. In addition to supporting its farmers, it provided the vast majority of the food eaten by royalty, guild masters, artisans, bishops, knights, and beggars. But its inhabitants were generally illiterate and ill-traveled. Almost all lived their entire lives without ever traveling beyond the sound of their church's bell (about a 5 mile radius).

Given their isolation, customs varied tremendously by time and place, even between neighboring manors. Record keeping was sparse, often limited to terse court rolls and tax records. Those rare writers who concerned themselves with small manors were rarely insiders, and often had an agenda or view they wished to spread in their works. This section should be taken as a gross generalization, at best.

CHILDREN

Childbirth was a mystery to most medieval men. Women gave birth alone, or surrounded by other women. Even gynecological texts rarely include a description of a birth, although some do describe breach births and cesarean sections. Childbirth was dangerous, but most women and infants survived it.

After birth, the child was washed in warm water mixed with oil, salt, rose petals, or other herbs. The mother or midwife cut the umbilical cord. If the child were unhealthy, it was baptized immediately. Otherwise, it was presented to the father. Folklore holds that in some regions, the father could reject the child at this point. If he held it, washed it, and named it, the child was accepted. If he did not, the child could be abandoned, presumably after a lay baptism. It does not appear from surviving records that infanticide was common in rural or urban areas.

If the infant had not already been baptized, he or she was taken to the church for baptism. The infant's godparents, the father, the midwife, and other family members were all present. After the priest made certain the infant was not already baptized, the child was baptized in the font and anointed with chrism. The child was then brought to the altar where the godparents made a profession of faith on its behalf. A feast often followed the ceremony.

Infants were tightly wrapped in swaddling clothes and left in a cradle for most of the first two years. The mother or older children were responsible for baby-sitting. The swaddling clothes made the infant less mobile and less able to get into trouble if left unattended or taken into the fields while his or her parents worked. In Italy, farm women might also have infants from local nobles and wealthy merchants in their home to wet nurse.

Toddlers, age 2-3, were allowed to wander and play. At this point, children

began to spend time divided by sex. Boys followed their fathers into the fields. Girls remained in the house and garden. Now free to wander, toddlers often injured themselves with the hearth fire, brewing and cooking pots, the well, and with farm tools. From ages 4 to 6, children were given increasingly responsible chores.

At ages 8 to 12, children were given productive chores. They watched younger children and animals, fetched water, fished, gathered, and helped with field and household tasks. In some households, their work allowed their mother the time to brew, spin, or otherwise try to make market products. At age 12, boys joined tithing groups. Children could not inherit freely until age 20 or 21.



CLOTHING

Let a man at rest have a pellice, and a cote or bilaut provided with sleeves and openings, slit at the crotch. Braies are needed to cover the lower limbs, and stockings or chaucers should be worn around the legs, while covering the feet with laced boots or leather shoes. An undershirt of muslin, silk, or cotton, or linen—the fur of the outer mantle should be gris or vair, or rabbit, or lérot, and the mantle's edging can be of sable or marten, or beaver, or otter, or fox fur . . .

— Alexander Neckam c. 1180

Male small landholders, lesser clergy, and farmers all wore the same basic styles of clothing – simple tunics and leggings of wool or perhaps linen. Women wore similar basic styles of wool or linen dresses and leggings. Cotton was grown in Italy and Spain, but it was rarely used for everyday clothing. Silk, imported from Byzantium and later from Italy, was reserved for the finest clothing and vestments. Sumptuary laws were for cities and royal courts. Small landholders could not afford the materials that would violate them.

Clothing included linen undershorts (*braies*), an undershirt (*chainse*) or underdress (*chemise* or *kirtle*), and an outer layer (*cote*, *bliaut*, or *sorcot*). In cold weather, one might add a fur-lined *pellice* and mantle. When saying Mass a priest or monk ideally wore a white linen undertunic (*alb*) and a decorated overtunic (*chasuble*). The ornateness and cleanliness of the garments depended greatly on the wealth of the parish. A deacon assisting a priest at a wealthy parish might even wear a silk *dalmatic* or linen *tunicle* (both kinds of upper tunics worn over the *alb*).

Medieval clothing did not have pockets; belongings were kept in belt pouches and sacks, or tied in long sleeves.

Most of the clothing was made of fabric made on the manor. A landholder or wealthy peasant might add a fur trim or lining. Boots, shoes, and belts were likely also made of local leather. Some farmers might have leather shoes; most wore wooden clogs or cloth wrappings.

For farmers and crafters, styles changed slowly. Ambitious or vain small landholders might try to follow the changing styles of the royal courts and the cities.

A landholder or exceptionally wealthy peasant's clothing might be accented with jewelry. Precious stones were given as gifts and were seen as investments and as collateral. Gems included diamonds,



sapphires, rubies, pearls, turquoises, emeralds, jet, coral, amber, garnet, and beryl. Certain gems were believed to have magical or medicinal powers. Gems were set into ring brooches used to fasten cloaks, belts, rings, neck chains, or sewn onto clothing. Almost all gems were imported, and would be rare on a small landholding except as family treasures, gifts, ransom, or war booty.

DIET

The diet of those living on the manor was as simple as their clothing. In the early Middle Ages, the major difference was volume and quality. Landholders could eat larger meals, and were more likely to have game meat included in the meal. Their bread was more finely ground; the flour was less likely to be stretched with chestnuts or acorns.

In 13C, a peasant family of four ate six quarters, five bushels of grain; two *flitches* (sides) of bacon; and unknown amounts of milk and cheese; some garden produce; and barley ale each year. Pottage made from beans, peas, and oatmeal was a staple. Grain was made into a coarse bread which contained enough abrasive grit to wear a peasant's teeth flat.

Everyone drank ale and cider made from the farmers' crops. A 13C landholder might eat 2-3 pounds of meat or fish per day and about 4,000 to 5,000 total calories per day. Children and the elderly likely drank goats' milk. Even in regions where wine was not grown, small landholders and parish

combat between two individual knights, usually mounted at first and continuing on foot.

Tournaments came in two basic forms: *à plaisance* (with blunted weapons) or *à outrance* (with sharpened weapons). There was even a water-joust form where the contestants stood in the front of a boat and tried to strike other contestants or a target mounted on a pole. In 15C, tournaments included a *kolbenturnier* ("baton course") in which contestants tried to knock each other's helms off with wooden maces. Another German format, the *scharfrennen*, used saddles without front or rear supports – the object was to unhorse one's opponent.

The tournament was likely invented by Geoffrey de Preuilly around 1062. Early tournaments were little more than agreed-upon battles between opponents. The only difference between an early tournament and war was the participants' intent. Knights used sharpened weapons and did not consider any strokes "foul" or any tactics "forbidden." Groups of knights might waylay a single knight; tourneyers were attacked after they had lost vital pieces of armor, or were shot with arrows. One could even hold back one's forces until after the battle was joined, or join in after the start. The only rules were to honor various refuges for knights to rest and rearm, and to capture and ransom the opponent, not kill him. It was considered unethical and foolish to injure a contestant's horse. Foolish, because the victor often won his opponent's horse as a prize.

Fatal accidents happened. In 1095, Evrardus held a tournament near Tournai, Flanders. Count Henri III of Louvain invited Jocelyn of Vorst, a vassal, to enter the lists against him. Jocelyn reluctantly did so and tried to unhorse Henri. The blow struck in the chest, killing the Count.

Tournaments became popular around 1170. Many were held in conjunction with markets and fairs so that a tourneyer could buy armor, arms, harnesses, and horses. In a few cases, knights on opposite sides of sieges sometimes agreed to a few lance passes to relieve boredom. Most tournaments were

held near the borders between England and France (near Calais especially), and between England and Scotland.

Mêlée tournaments in 12-14C involved teams of 20 to 250 contestants. The day before the tournament was filled with trial jousts and, when the Church permitted, masses. The tournament commenced with a series of individual jousts (*commençaillies*), then the *mêlée* tournaments with lance, then sword. Those captured moved outside the list to arrange terms with their captors. Others could rest and rearm in refuges called *recets*.

Tournaments were an investment. Contestants,

of course, had to pay for their own travel, lodgings, and horse care. In 1285-6, John of Brittany spent 100 l on four months of tournament going. Some households traveled to tournaments together and used them to train the household forces and retainers as a unit. These household knights and retainers then looked to their patrons for payments to replace ransomed or

wounded horses and to care for those injured or killed in battle.

In pre-13C tournaments, mounted contestants were often accompanied by foot soldiers and archers. Successful unlanded knights or those with small holdings might find important patrons. Successful large landholders might attract household knights and retainers. Mercenary leaders also followed the tournaments and might be more easily hired by successful contestants.

In many cases, the winner was awarded the loser's armor and horse, which he could keep or sell. The winner could also often claim a ransom from the loser himself. In one fabliau, a knight is described as "*ne vigne, ne terre*" who lived on what he made in ransom. When he became too old to win tournaments, he fell into poverty.

Often the vanquished promised to pay the ransom and was then freed on parole to return home and raise it. If the vanquished failed to pay, the victor could sue the vanquished, sue any sureties, or



FAIR FEES

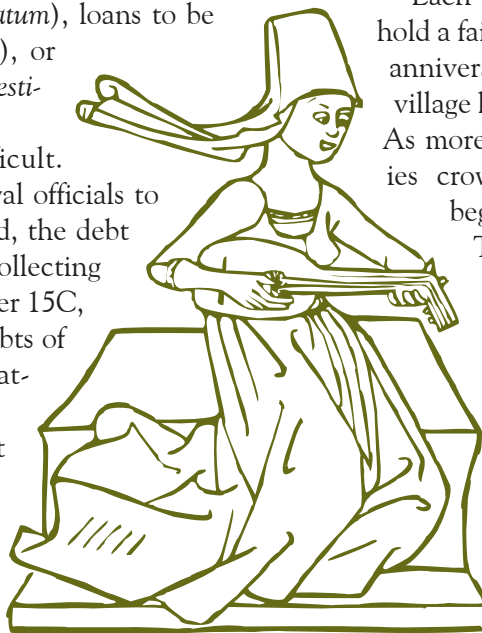
<u>Item</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Price</u>
Bed, rented	1250-1320	Huntingdonshire	4 ½ d for fair
Bed, rented	1250-1320	Winchester	½ d per night
Entry fee, cider	1250-1320	Winchester	4 d per cask
Entry fee, geese	1250-1320	Winchester	1 goose of 13
Entry fee, wheat	1250-1320	Winchester	2 d per cartload
Entry fee, wine	1250-1320	Winchester	4 d per cask
Fine, juror's failure to appear	1250-1320	Winchester	6 d
House, purchase, near fairgrounds	1250-1320	Winchester	30 l
Stall rental	1250-1320	Winchester	3 d per day

could be sued in royal court if he or she interfered with the collection.

Farmers also borrowed money, usually from each other. They bought goods and services on credit or installment payments, pledged to make annual payments, and pledged as sureties on each others' debts. The sums were small. In 1382-1429, a study of Writtle's court found debt collection suits ranged in amounts from 2 to 10 s. The debts were either loans of goods to be returned (*commodatum*), loans to be paid in money or grain (*mutuum*), or loans to be repaid in services (*prestium*).

Enforcing loans was difficult. Moneylenders often turned to royal officials to foreclose on property. If that failed, the debt was sold to someone capable of collecting it, often a rival of the debtor. In later 15C, large landholders began buying debts of smaller landholders and consolidating their lands. Collection suits between farmers could be brought up to ten years after the default, even if the creditor and debtor had both died.

Moneylenders were, not surprisingly, very unpopular. Partly this was because they were foreigners (Italians) or of a different faith (Jews). Partly it was because moneylenders lived in towns and cities, rarely having any personal ties to their clients. One of the first things that happened in any uprising was for a moneylender's books to be destroyed and the moneylender himself killed.



LOCAL FAIRS

Most of a manor's trade was done at local fairs and nearby market towns. Markets were held weekly in larger villages, in towns, and at the gates of some abbeys and castles. These traded grain, food, and local crafts. Local officials were supposed to ensure fair dealing, but strangers were considered fair game for swindles.

Each church had a traditional right to hold a fair on the feast of its saint and on the anniversary of its dedication. Thus, each village held at least one local fair each year. As more chapels, churches, and monasteries crowded the countryside, their fairs began stealing each others' markets.

The English crown eventually required landholders to either have a license (*morlat*) to hold a fair or to demonstrate a customary right to hold it. In applying for a *morlat*, the landholder had to assert that the fair would not prejudice the rights of existing fairs. The crown often required fairs to be at least 7 miles apart – a reasonable distance assuming a farmer traveled 1/3 of a day to the fair,

spent 1/3 of a day at the fair, and returned home in the remaining 1/3 of a day. Multiday fairs had a larger minimum distance, estimated at about 20 miles. Moreover, in 1328, Edward III required landholders to announce at the beginning of each fair how long it would last so that both the landholder and mer-

PRICES

<u>Item</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Price</u>
Ale, per gallon	1301	Oxford, England	1 ½ d
Ale, per gallon	1356	London	1 ½ d
Ass	1326-50	Pistoia	11 l
Ass	1350	Ravenna	8 l
Ass	1351-75	Pistoia, Italy	15 l (ave)
Ass	1376-1400	Pistoia, Italy	20 l 8 s (ave)
Ass	1400-25	Pistoia, Italy	16 l 4 s (ave)
Barley, per bushel	1210	Farnham, England	1 s 6 d
Barley, per bushel	1213	Farnham, England	2 s 4 d
Barley, per bushel	1301	Oxford, England	7 ½ d
Barley, per bushel	1356	London	7 ½ d
Barley, per bushel	1370	London	7 d
Barley, per bushel	1387	London	6 d
Beer, 3 persons, 1 day	1210	Newcastle, England	4 d
Bread, 3 persons, 1 day	1331	Newcastle, England	2 d
Butter, per pound	1299	Farnham, England	1 d
Butter, per pound	1301	Farnham, England	½ d
Calf	1326-50	Pistoia, Italy	17 l 3 s (ave)
Calf	1351-75	Pistoia, Italy	19 l 9 s (ave)
Calf	1376-1400	Pistoia, Italy	30 l (ave)
Calf	1400-25	Pistoia, Italy	20 l 2 s (ave)
Cannon	1350s	England	13 s 4 d
Carriage	1333	England	1,000 l
Carriage	1397	England	400 l
Cart, body	1313-14	Glatton, England	18 d
Cart, farm, used	1303	Farnham, England	9 s
Cart, fit wheel to axle	1356-7	Pittington, England	3 d
Cart, wheel	1313-14	Glatton, England	8 d
Cart, wheel	1293-4	Knowle, England	8 d
Cask, empty	1300-05	England	8 d
Cheese, per 182 lbs	1210	Farnham, England	6 s 5 d
Cheese, per 182 lbs	1248	Farnham, England	7 s
Cheese, per 182 lbs	1290	Farnham, England	9 s
Chicken	1213	Farnham, England	½ d
Chicken	1232	Farnham, England	1 d
Coal, sea, per bushel	1300-05	England	1 d
Coffer, ornamented	1384	Florence, Italy	7-8 l (pair)
Cow	mid-8C	England	3 s
Cow	1213	Farnham, England	2 s
Cow	1262	Farnham, England	9 s 9 d
Cow	1263-4	Pistolia, Italy	21 l 8 s (ave)
Cow	14C	England	9 s 5 d
Cow	1302	Pisa	18 l
Cow	1326-50	Pistoia, Italy	21 l 8 s (ave)

PRICES

<u>Item</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Price</u>
Cow	1348-9	Waltham, England	3 s 4½ d
Cow	1350	Ravenna	10 l
Cow	1351-75	Pistoia, Italy	37 l 7 s (ave)
Cow	1376-1400	Pistoia, Italy	49 l 5 s (ave)
Cow	1400-25	Pistoia, Italy	35 l 7 s (ave)
Eggs, per thousand	1220	Farnham, England	1 s 8 d
Eggs, per thousand	1232	Farnham, England	2 s 6 d
Fetters	1222	Farnham, England	6 d
Fodder, 3 horses, 1 day	1331	Newcastle, England	10 d
Fowl	14C	England	1 d
Goat	1326-50	Pistoia, Italy	2 l 1 s (ave)
Goat	1351-75	Pistoia, Italy	2 l 8 s (ave)
Goat	1376-1400	Pistoia, Italy	3 l 3 s (ave)
Goat	1400-25	Pistoia, Italy	3 l 2 s (ave)
Ginger	13C	England	70 s
Goshawk, female †	15C	England	3 l 10 s
Goshawk, male †	15C	England	28 s
Herring, per thousand	1220	London, England	5 s
Horse, cart/work	1250-1350	England	28 s 6 d
Horse, cart	1348-9	Waltham, England	7 s 10¾ d
Horse, courser	1154-89	England	20-30 s
Horse, courser	1250-1350	England	10-50 l
Horse, courser	1302	Artois, France	60 l
Horse, destrier	1154-89	England	30-60 s
Horse, destrier	1250-1350	England	50-100 l
Horse, "hobby"	1250-1350	England	40 s - 2 l
Horse, "pack"	1250-1350	England	7-8 s
Horse, palfry	11C	England	20-30 s
Horse, palfry	1250-1350	England	10-50 l
Horse, palfry	1302	Artois, France	50 l
Horse, plow	mid-8C	England	12 s
Horse, plow	1208	Farnham, England	6 s 1 d
Horse, plow	1225	Farnham, England	6 s 5 d
Horse, plow	1326-50	Pistoia, Italy	24 l 7 s (ave)
Horse, plow	1351-75	Pistoia, Italy	36 l 4 s (ave)
Horse, plow	1376-1400	Pistoia, Italy	38 l 3 s (ave)
Horse, plow	1400-25	Pistoia, Italy	41 l 2 s (ave)
Horse, rouncy	1250-1350	England	5-10 l
Horse, rouncy	1302	Artois, France	34 l
Horse, war (see pg 34)			
Horse, work	1348-9	Waltham, England	2 s 6 d
Millet, per bushel	1170	Pisa, Italy	½ s

† hunting bird

XII. Warfare

There are many fine books on medieval weapons and armor. *Fief* can barely scratch the surface of the styles of armor and weapons, knights' tactics, and the history of battles. And most of those refinements were outside a small landholder's concerns. Small landholders could rarely afford fancy equipment or evolve convoluted tactics. Most often, they formed part of a larger landholder's force and served as they were instructed to.

The main military justification for manors was to support a decentralized cavalry and support forces. From a landholder's perspective, the manor provided a steady supply of food, feed and fodder, scattered fortifications, labor on fortifications and roads, and money for armor and weapons. From a farmer's perspective, the manor provided a nearby fortification and a trained, armored warrior to respond quickly to brigands and greedy neighbors. From a higher noble's perspective, manors provided a body of trained warriors and fortifications which he or she did not need to maintain. The noble needed only provide some support for contingencies.

In 1307, Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, retained Sir Bartholomew de Enfield, a landless knight, for life. In peace, Sir Bartholomew received hay and oats for four horses, wages for three men and his chamberlain, and could dine in Earl Humphrey's hall. In war, Sir Bartholomew received hay and oats for eight horses, wages for seven men and his chamberlain, and sufficient horses for himself in war and in tournament. In addition, Sir Bartholomew received land worth 40 silver marks per annum (3 l 5 s 4 p), which could be seized by the earl if he failed to perform the military services due.

There were a few manors held for nonmilitary duties called sergeanties. The landowner might be

obligated to look after a liege's hawks or dogs, or provide equipment or naval vessels. In one particularly silly example, the holder of Hemingstone in Suffolk was obligated to leap, whistle, and fart for the king's amusement on Christmas Day. Sergeanties were uncommon, and were phased out in 13C in favor of military service or rents.

ARMIES

Medieval armies were small. The entire force at the Battle of Hastings (1066) was about 8,000 soldiers, of which 2,000-3,000 were cavalry. William the Conqueror's post-conquest army consisted of 5,000-6,000 knights, each owing 2 months service in war and 40 days' service in peace, not counting castle garrison duties. When Louis VI of France faced Henry I of

England at Brémule (1119), he had 400 knights to face Henry's 500 knights. Three French knights were killed, 140 were taken prisoner (common soldiers and peasants were often beneath the notice of chroniclers).

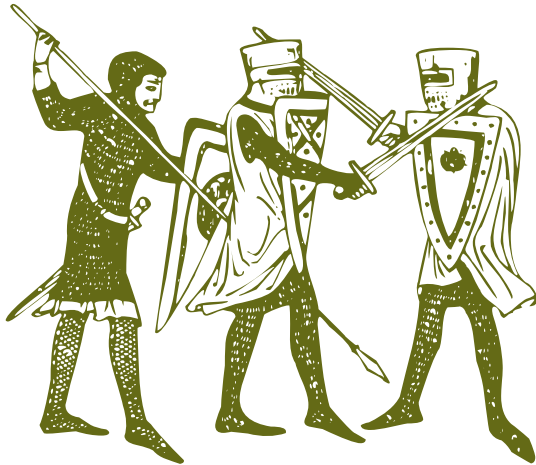
The army was loosely organized into units of major landholders and their vassals. There were no standing armies or organized regiments. Each group had its own loyalties, goals, and rivalries. The French, in particular, were cursed with poor discipline in the Hundred Years War. Knights rode over each other and their own auxiliary forces in their haste to engage the English and capture knights for ransom. In addition to the landholder's units, there might also be mercenaries, auxiliaries, servants, and camp followers.

Heraldry came into fashion in mid-13C as a way to distinguish armored knights and their units in battle or on the tournament field. Heraldry started as a fairly simple system, but quickly evolved a complex set of rules about colors, images, and their posi-



from the kingdom. Mercenaries reappeared in northern Europe during the Hundred Years War (14-15C) when their usefulness outweighed their political cost.

As troops, mercenaries were effective so long as they were steadily paid and kept busy. There is not much information available about who composed the mercenary forces or how they were trained. It is likely that many were younger sons of small landholders, artisans, peasants, and escaped serfs.



Naval Service

In the Norman Kingdom of Sicily, some landholders paid a royal tax, the *marinarios*, for upkeep of the royal navy. Other landholders were liable to provide ships and sailors. In 12C, Caltagirone owed 250 sailors for the fleet; Nicosia owed 296 sailors; the bishop of Patti owed 20 sailors. The obligations were reduced in early 13C. Other landholders owed duty watching the coast and supplying wood, pitch, and other naval supplies.

SERFS' OBLIGATIONS

Originally, the ability to bear arms was a mark of freedom. If a landholder armed a serf, the serf was thereby manumitted. Conversely, if a free man refused to serve when called, he could be made a serf. In 1225, the English crown gave serfs the responsibility of bearing arms in defense of the kingdom. Those who possessed 20 s in movable goods were to have an iron headpiece and padded doublet. Those with 40 s in movable goods were to have an axe and spear. In 1264, each village had to choose four to eight soldiers to be armed with spears, bows and arrows, crossbows, and swords to serve the crown.

BANDITS, MERCENARIES, AND FORAGING PARTIES

Bandits were an ongoing menace to manors. Criminals, runaway serfs, and other vagabonds commonly lived in the forests and marshes near manors where they could steal crops and waylay travelers. Occasionally, a bold bandit might try to capture an ill-defended small manor. The capture generally lasted until the landholder's neighbors or liege recaptured the manor.

In war, a small manor's most likely foe was not a large siege, but wandering groups of mercenaries. Dismissed by the crown or a major landholder after a battle, these wandering groups would often pillage the countryside on their way to their next employer. Walter Map described the bands in 1180 as an abominable heretical sect, thousands strong, armed with leather and iron, who pillaged, violated, and devastated everything. Some captured castles or fortified monasteries, declared themselves the landholders, and began to exact services from the countryside. When peace returned, the major landholders were forced to root them out of their lairs.

England had less problems with mercenaries than France and Italy. The Magna Carta obliged the crown to send away "all foreign knights and crossbowmen and mercenaries who had crossed over with their arms and horses to harm the land."

Another threat was foraging parties. Medieval armies did not travel with supply trains before 15C; they lived off the countryside. It was common for armies to deny their foes forage by burning and trampling crops, looting and burning villages, and slaughtering animals. Being on the fringes of a siege could be as devastating to a small manor as being its target. Fortunately, unless a manor was located on a contested border, this was a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Robber Knights

The massive changes following the Plague of 1347-48 impoverished many landholders. Grain prices fell sharply because of decreased demand and increased use of the best arable land. The cost of maintaining ever more elaborate armor, and larger horses to carry it, rose. Peasants and serfs fled the countryside for better pay in the cities. Those landholders who could not find bureaucratic posts or

Timeline

The timeline includes major dates in medieval history, which provide some reference points for readers. It also includes many natural events, like famines, floods, and plagues, which may help show conditions affecting various regions. Finally, it includes laws and uprisings which might especially effect small landholders and farmers.

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---------|---|
| 395 | Roman Empire divided between East and West | 842 | Danes pillage London |
| 410 | Rome sacked | 843 | Carolingian Empire collapses; Treaty of Verdun divides it into three parts. |
| 451 | Halley's Comet appears; Huns raid France | 844 | Danes raid Spain |
| 460 | Celts arrive in Bretagne from England | 845 | Danes pillage Paris and Hamburg |
| 472 | Vesuvius erupts | 854 | All Franks required to swear fealty to the crown |
| 476 | Odoacar and the Goths sack Rome (End of the Western Roman Empire) | 873 | All immigrants must swear loyalty to Frankish crown if they wish to hold property |
| 481 | Clovis begins his rule of France | 878 | Alfred the Great of England defeats the Danes at Eddington |
| 496 | Clovis baptized | 858 | Alfred the Great recaptures London |
| 511 | Clovis' rule ends | 909 | Monastery at Cluny founded |
| 520 | St. Benedict of Nursia begins compiling the Benedictine Rule for monasteries | 911 | King Charles the Simple enters into a treaty with the Norse chieftain Rolf which creates the Duchy of Normandie; England begins paying Danegeld |
| 542 | Plague in Constantinople | 987 | Capetians replace Carolingians as French Kings |
| 571 | Muhammad born | 989 | Church begins proclaiming the "Peace of God" |
| 579 | Peasant revolt against King Chiperich near Limoges, France. | 996 | Peasant uprising in Normandie |
| 590 | Pope Gregory I "the Great" begins reign | 1000 | Serf rebellion in Normandie |
| 604 | Pope Gregory I dies | 1002 | First Cathar executed |
| 622 | Hegira - Muhammad flees Mecca for Medina | 1006 | Supernova visible |
| 632 | Muhammad dies | 1009 | Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem burned by Arabs. Orléans Jews blamed for instigating the destruction |
| 636 | Muslims capture Damascus and Jerusalem | 1017 | Truce of God outlaws combat on Sundays |
| 686 | All churches with burial ground entitled to tithes of associated estate | 1033 | Famine Year; solar eclipse visible in Europe |
| 687 | Pepin of Heristal becomes first Carolingian leader | 1057 | Patavene revolt begins in Milan's countryside |
| 711 | Arabs invade Spain | 1060 | Norman conquest of Sicily begins |
| 714 | Charles Martel begins reign in France | 1062 | Tournaments invented |
| 732 | Arabs defeated at Tours, France, by Charles Martel | 1066 | Norman invasion of England; Halley's Comet appears |
| 751 | Pepin the Short becomes King of France, Merovingian dynasty ends | 1071 | Sicily recaptured by Normans |
| 754 | St. Boniface dies | 1075 | Pope Gregory VII bans lay investiture; Patavene revolt in Milan ends |
| 755 | Umayyad caliphate begins in Spain | 1082-85 | Outbreaks of St. Anthony's Fire (rye ergot poisoning) in Normandy |
| 768 | Charlemagne begins reign | 1084 | Carthusian order founded by St. Bruno at Grande Chartreuse; Robert Giscard's Normans sack Rome |
| 778 | Attack on Charlemagne's rear guard inspires the <i>Song of Roland</i> | 1085 | Capture of Toledo by Christians; Domesday book (English census); Robert Giscard defeated |
| 787 | Danish raids on England begin | 1086 | Famine, animal murrain in England |
| 800 | Charlemagne crowned Roman Emperor of the West ("Holy Roman Empire") | 1095 | First Crusade begins; Council of Clermont |
| 809 | Arab Empire reaches its height | 1098 | Crusaders take Edessa and Antioch; Cistercian order founded at Cîteaux |
| 814 | Charlemagne dies; Although no comet is seen outside Europe, one is recorded as having appeared to mark his passing | 1099 | First Crusade ends with the capture of Jerusalem |
| 817 | St. Benedict of Aniane expands and revises the Benedictine Rule; Fire devastates Rome | 1103 | Famine, animal murrain in England |
| 827 | Arabs seize Sicily | 1106 | Venice hit by floods and fire |
| 841 | Peasant revolt against King Louis "the Pious" in Saxony, Germany | 1111 | Animal murrain in England |
| | | 1124 | Crusaders take Tyre and occupy most of the Palestinian coast |
| | | 1128 | Knights Templar founded |
| | | 1131 | Animal murrain in England |
| | | 1139 | Second Lateran Council outlaws use of crossbows against Christians |
| | | 1141 | Crusaders driven from Edessa |

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