

TCI Chapter 2 Feudalism

2.4 Lords and Ladies During Feudal Times



Like monarchs, lords and ladies were members of the nobility, the highest-ranking class in medieval society. Most of them lived on manors. Some lords had one manor, while others had several. Those who had more than one manor usually lived in one for a few months and then traveled with their families to another.

Manor Houses and Castles Many of the people on a manor lived with the lord's family in the manor house. Built of wood or stone, manor houses were surrounded by gardens and outbuildings, such as kitchens and stables. They were protected by high walls.

The manor house was the center of the community. In times of trouble, villagers entered its walls for protection. Its great hall served as the lord's court. It was also a place for special celebrations and feasts, such as those given at Christmas or after a harvest.

Kings and queens, high-ranking nobles, and wealthy lords lived in even grander structures: castles. Castles were built for many purposes. One of a castle's main **functions** was to serve as a home. Castles were also one of the most important forms of military technology. With their moats, strong walls, and gates, they were built for defense. Finally, their large size and central locations made castles visual reminders of the social hierarchy and the power of the ruling classes.

The earliest medieval castles were built of wood and surrounded by high wooden fences. The strongest part, the *motte*, was built on a hilltop. A walled path linked the motte to a lower enclosed court, the *bailey*, where most people lived. After about 1100 C.E., most castles were built of stone to resist attacks by more powerful siege weapons.

Castles gradually became more elaborate. Many had tall towers for looking out across the land. The main castle building had a variety of rooms, including storerooms, kitchens, a library, a dining hall, sleeping quarters for distinguished guests, and the lord and lady's quarters.

The Responsibilities and Daily Life of Lords and Ladies It was the lord's responsibility to manage and defend his land and the people who worked it. The lord appointed officials to make sure villagers carried out their duties, which included farming the lord's land and paying rent in the form of crops, meat, and other foods. Lords also acted as judges in manor courts and had the

power to fine and punish those who broke the law. Some lords held posts in the king's government. In times of war, lords fought for their own higher-ranking lords, or at least supplied them with a well-trained fighting force.

In theory, only men were part of the feudal relationship between lord and vassal. However, it was quite common in the Middle Ages for noblewomen to hold fiefs and inherit land. Except for fighting, these women had all the duties that lords had. They ran their estates, sat as judges in manor courts, and sent their knights to serve in times of war.

Noblewomen who were not landowners were still extremely busy. They were responsible for raising and training their own children and, often, the children of other noble families. Ladies were also responsible for overseeing their household or households. Some households had hundreds of people, including priests, master hunters, and knights-in-training called *pages* and *squires*, who assisted the knights. There were also cooks, servants, artists, craftspeople, and grooms. Entertainment was provided by musicians and jesters who performed amusing jokes and stunts.

When they weren't hard at work, lords and ladies enjoyed hunting and hawking (hunting with birds), feasting and dancing, board games such as chess, and reading. Ladies also did fine stitching and embroidery, or decorative sewing.

Although nobles and monarchs had the most privileged lives in medieval times, they were not always easy or comfortable by modern standards. Lit only by candles and warmed only by open fires, manor homes and castles could be gloomy and cold. There was little or no privacy. Fleas and lice infected all medieval buildings, and people generally bathed only once a week, if that. Clothes were not washed daily either. Diseases affected the rich as well as the poor. And of course, warfare was a great and ever-present danger.

Copy the following questions and write complete responses (in complete sentences).

1. Sketch a typical manor house in medieval Europe. Be sure to include not only the house but its surroundings.
2. What were the functions of the castle?
3. Describe the responsibilities of lords on the manor.
4. What was the role of noblewomen on a manor? Be descriptive.
5. How would you describe life on the manor?