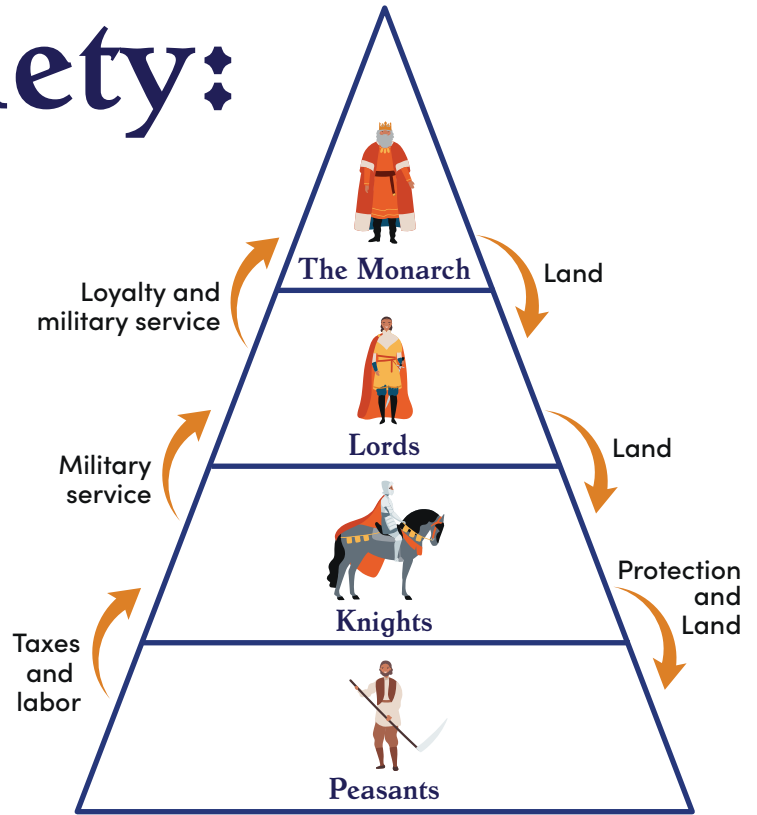# Feudal Society: Overview

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the 400s CE, Europeans lived under a system called feudalism for nearly 1,000 years. **Feudalism** was a society where people worked and fought in return for land and protection.

Under feudalism, people were born into social classes that they could not change. Classes had different jobs, land ownership, and obligations.

Read the chart to learn about feudal society. Then complete the tables on the next page.

The Monarch — Land
Loyalty and military service
Lords — Land
Military service
Knights — Protection and Land
Taxes and labor
Peasants

The Monarch	A **monarch** owned an entire kingdom of land and was the highest feudal authority. Kings and queens gained their status through a family connection to a previous monarch. Monarchs governed their kingdoms and expected obedience from everyone living within them. But the monarch could not directly manage all of a kingdom's land on their own. So, the monarch was obligated to share their land with the social class of lords.
Lords	**Lords** were major landowners with the second highest status in feudal society. Like a monarch, they gained their authority based on birth and inherited the right to govern large areas of land within a kingdom. But this power depended on the monarch. The monarch gave individual lords a large area of land, known as a **fief**. In return, lords owed the monarch loyalty and military service. When wars broke out, the lords were obligated to support the monarch with an army.
Knights	A lord's army was based on **knights**, the professional soldiers of feudal society. Knights provided their lords with skilled military service, fighting in return for small areas of land within a fief. So, knights were not just soldiers; they were also minor landowners. Knights governed these small territories as local rulers. This power meant knights were also responsible for protecting ordinary people living on their land.
Peasants	**Peasants** were the common people and the largest social class. Peasants were at the bottom of feudal society and typically did not own any land. Instead, peasants rented land from a landlord, usually a knight or lord. In return for land, peasants were obligated to farm their fields, provide food, perform other types of work for their landlord, and pay the landlord taxes. So, peasants' labor supported the classes above them. In return for these services, peasants received some military protection from the upper classes.

Feudal Society: Overview

Complete each table with the feudal social class's job, land ownership, and obligations.

The Monarch	Job:
	Land ownership:
	Obligations:

Lords	Job:
	Land ownership and source of land:
	Obligations:

Knights	Job:
	Land ownership and source of land:
	Obligations:

Peasants	Job:
	Land ownership and source of land:
	Obligations: