

READING 2

Candice Goucher, Charles LeGuin, and Linda Walton, *In the Balance: Themes in Global History* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), selections from chapter 7, “Ties that Bind: Lineage, Clientage, and Caste.”

Abstract: Using the examples of feudal Europe and feudal Japan, this essay emphasizes how some political structures were shaped by ideologies based on clientage. While each society was distinct in many ways, both shared similarities in their reliance on ideas about social organization and concepts of community to cement the ties between—and minimize the differences among—diverse internal elements.

Introduction

Basic forms of kinship organization, such as lineage, often served as a model for clientage and patronage. These terms describe patterns of power relations between and among individuals or groups in which someone, the patron, exercises power over someone else, the client. Within a lineage, for example, various kinds of power relations might appear, including patronage, in which the clients were the weaker, poorer, or more distantly related members of a large family group who served other family members who were wealthier or more powerful. “Patron-client” also describes the lord-vassal relationship of European feudalism discussed in this chapter.

Lineage and clientage were patterns of social organization based on the understanding and acceptance of social differences and the resulting unequal relationships that existed between individuals. Relationships defined by lineage and clientage were inherited, yet personal, and they provided a basis for the construction of both individual and social identity. Such relationships were also a means of distributing power in society, and together with religion and other forms of ideology, political structures, and economic systems, patterns of social organization helped to weave the fabric of human communities throughout the world. Exploiting and extending familiar social bonds, communities created the organization necessary to cement small polities and at times large empires. Tension between the forces of centralization that led to the growth of large-scale polities such as empires, and the decentralized patterns of political life characteristic of societies ordered by lineage and clientage both fueled historical change and highlighted the powerful continuities of lineage and clientage.

Feudalism in Europe

Feudalism was an alternative to societies based primarily either on the personal ties of kinship or on the impersonal bureaucratic structures of

centralized polities. Broadly defined, feudalism describes a hierarchy of power in which land constitutes the principal form of wealth and provides the basis for political and social orders as well as economic structures. Feudalism is a form of clientage that resulted in hereditary distinctions and may even have originated in them. The institutions and practices of European feudalism developed after the power of a strong centralized state (the Roman Empire) had shifted onto local political units. Central to feudalism was the personal, specifically military, relationship between lord (patron) and vassal (client). The relationship was often perpetuated through family structures and in some cases actually reflected blood ties.

Feudalism in some parts of Europe developed when central government broke down and public functions, obligations, and privileges were taken over by individuals operating under a variety of private hierarchical arrangements created by personal obligation. Feudalism in its various forms was prevalent in western Europe from the ninth to thirteenth centuries, when private administrative structures – law, ideology, economic functions, and social relationships – assumed many of the attributes of centralized states. In parts of eastern Europe, feudalism was imposed later and lasted longer.

Origins and Characteristics of European Feudalism

European feudalism is commonly considered to be two closely interdependent systems. Feudalism involved the relationship between landowners, in which the most powerful landowners provided aid and protection to less powerful landowners who had enough wealth to own horses and arms. The less powerful landowners, in turn, owed allegiance and military service to the most powerful. The vassal (or client) gradually became identified as a knight, a warrior around whom evolved a highly elaborate culture and lifestyle. The knight's prestige depended upon fighting, and knights justified their existence by waging wars. Many knights were descended from elites through the male line, and they maintained their power through kinship networks and alliances with other powerful lords. Because of the cultural and political significance of warfare among the elite, the status of women declined as they were culturally excluded from warfare in most cases.

The economic basis on which the feudal system rested, manorialism, was essentially a relationship of dominance and subordination between those who claimed authority over the land and those families who cultivated it. People and land, then, were the basic ingredients of feudalism. A fief, commonly a grant in the form of land, was presented by a lord to a vassal. The vassal accordingly became a landholder, the lord of the fief. The land was organized into a manor or manors, which were worked by serfs, laborers with limited rights, whose labor and produce sustained the landlord and indeed the whole

feudal-manorial system. Serfs were obligated to remain on the land and sometimes to give a portion of the annual harvest to the lord. Their claims to the land were more or less permanent and could be inherited by their children.

Feudalism developed in the centuries during and after the disintegration of the Roman Empire, in a period of great turmoil and political instability, and there is no doubt that warfare was among its causes. In agricultural practices, Roman gang slaves were gradually replaced with laborers tied to the land. Germanic invaders sometimes modified the arrangements using their traditional notions of clan affiliations and loyalty to the chieftain or leader. What emerged under feudalism was the peasant family as the basic unit of production.

The specific arrangements of the contract that were basic to the feudal relationship varied widely across Europe, although they often involved military protection and service. The contractual relationship was a way of reconciling the tension between authority and liberty by way of contract. The individual gave up only enough freedom to ensure effective cooperation. When feudalism began to work on a local level to stabilize relations of power, kings and emperors also adopted it to strengthen monarchies. Feudalism flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as it spread across Europe from the areas between the Rhine and Loire Rivers.

Patron-Client Relationships

The feudal characteristic of personal dependence also had Roman and Germanic origins. The Romans had instituted patronage, by which the wealthy and powerful took clients under their protection. Many clients acted as guards for their patrons, and in time German immigrants, not just Romans, became clients. When they took over western Europe, the Germans continued to use the patron-client relationship. The system was, after all, not altogether different from the practices of the Germanic system, wherein chieftains shared the fruits of victory with their warriors. When the Germans shared out the Roman lands they conquered, the personal warrior-chief relationship was combined with tenant-landlord dependency, and the feudal-manorial relationship was eventually the result.

The practice of men without resources placing themselves under the protection of a wealthy, stronger patron dates from at least the eighth century. The following description from that time suggests both the voluntary and reciprocal nature of entering into the contractual relationship between patron and client:

Inasmuch as it is known to all and sundry that I lack the wherewithal to feed and clothe myself, I have asked of your pity, and your goodwill has granted to me permission to deliver and commend myself into your authority and

protection . . . in return you have undertaken to aid and sustain me in food and clothing, while I have undertaken to serve you and deserve well of you as far as lies in my power. And for as long as I shall live, I am bound to serve you and respect you as a free man ought, and during my lifetime I have not the right to withdraw from your authority and protection, but must, on the contrary, for the remainder of my days remain under it.

And in virtue of this action, if one of us wishes to alter the terms of the agreement, he can do so after paying a fine of ten solidi to the other. But the agreement itself shall remain in force. Whence it has seemed good to us that we should both draw up and confirm two documents of the same tenor, and this they have done.

Immunity

The granting of rights over land in return for military or other services is the essence of the feudal system, but before this relationship could be firmly established, land had to be free or immune to possible intervention by the centralized authority. Immunity created a territory free from interference by the state, so that public functions, such as the administration of justice or protection, became the prerogative of private individuals. For example, the early Frankish kings granted churches and monasteries immunity for their lands and thus created a sort of religious state within their kingdom. Similarly, when fiefs – grants of land – were handed down by lords to vassals (and by inheritance to the vassal's heirs), local government functions, ranging from road building to administering justice, were assumed by the vassal to whom the fief had been given.

Fiefs were primarily pieces of land held on terms of personal obligation. There were three main varieties of such tenure (landholding): ecclesiastical (Church), military, and general. Ecclesiastical fiefs were those given to the Church, which provided spiritual benefits to the donor – and often nothing else – in return. There were two principal types of military tenure. Field service in the overlord's army, generally for up to forty days a year (though the service might be shorter), was one type. The other main form of military tenure involved guard service at the overlord's residence. According to one medieval view:

It is seemly that men should plough and dig and work hard in order that the earth may yield the fruits from which the knight and his horse will live; and that the knight who rides and does a lord's work, should get his wealth from the things on which his men are to spend much toil and fatigue.

Other forms of tenure also existed, and these involved general, rather than spiritual or military, services. Fiefs were granted to vassals for supplying overlords with goods (horses, equipment, provisions) or personal services (hospitality or comfort in sickness, or even holding their heads when they grew seasick crossing the English Channel). Toward the end of the feudal

age, with the return of a money economy, these services were commuted into payments into the overlord's treasury.

The Feudal Contract

The basis of all feudal relationships was the contract, a powerful legal and cultural force for cohesion in a world that was effectively localized and decentralized. A contract took the form of an oath of fealty (loyalty), by which homage was sworn by the vassal to the overlord for the grant of a fief. Oaths of fealty were complicated by the fact that vassals commonly held fiefs from more than one overlord. Thus two forms of homage became necessary. Liege homage was that paid to the first lord from whom a fief was received. Simple homage, which recognized and accepted the priority of liege homage, signified a contract with other overlords. In exceptional cases, such as in Normandy and in England after the Norman Conquest (1066), liege homage was paid to the king as well as to the first lord, and the king took precedence.

The contract between overlord and vassal confirmed their obligations to each other and lasted so long as its terms were honored or enforced. In general, the overlord owed the vassal support in the form of administration of justice, defense against attack, and honorable treatment as an equal. Vassals owed their overlords services such as the military and general services described above, payments (inheritance, ransom, dowry, knighthood fees), and the acceptance of various other obligations. Since the feudal contract rarely involved an actual written document, dramatization and ceremony were used to emphasize and publicly record the agreement. Often the dramatization took the form of humiliating rituals that underscored the subordination of the vassal (or client). For example, the vassal might be forced to kneel down or kiss the lord. The hair of a would-be knight might be shorn to symbolize the new state into which he was entering. The serf belonging to a monastery might put the bell rope around his neck as a symbol of the perpetual servitude into which he had entered.

Subinfeudation

Vassals who possessed extensive fiefs divided out portions of them in a process known as subinfeudation. The result of subinfeudation was that every landholder in the feudal system became both a vassal and an overlord, excepting (theoretically) the lord king and the lowliest vassal holding a single, indivisible fief. This arrangement grew unsystematically in western Europe in the tenth and eleventh centuries and so complicated tenure relationships that it carried with it the seeds of its own disintegration. In actuality, lords had little control over their lesser vassals. The descriptive phrase of the time, "The vassal of my vassal is not my vassal," describes the dissolution of the ability of the overlord to maintain effective authority over fiefs granted to vassals. Even kings "holding only from God" – who owed

homage to no one and were purportedly above such fractionalizing involvements – became mere landlords bound by feudal contracts to vassals who were their equals and sometimes their superiors in military strength and political power. The power of feudal monarchs was so limited by contracts to a position that they were little more than first among equals. The limitation of royal power, a striking feature of feudal society, was a result of such practices as subinfeudation. Attempts to end the erosion of the power of monarchies and to reestablish centralized sovereignty were the process by which feudal society in western Europe was ultimately transformed.

Gender and Feudal Society

Feudal society in western Europe was crude and often violent, given the instability and constant competition inherent in feudal relationships. The Church sought to soften the harshness and brutality of feudal life by proclaiming the Truce of God, which prohibited fighting during certain times, and the Peace of God, which prohibited brutality to women, children, and the clergy. But male warriors were idolized, and social relationships revolved around them. Indeed, the most representative example of feudal literature, the eleventh-century *Song of Roland*, an epic description of an event that occurred during the withdrawal of the Frankish armies from Spain, is a celebration of the belligerent, male “virtues” that were so basic to feudal relationships. Women are not mentioned in the poem, despite the fact that female labor and services made possible the feudal era.

While the basic purposes and interests of feudal contracts may not apparently have been served by women, circumstances at times lessened the male monopoly of power in the feudal system, particularly as the system began to disintegrate following the tenth century. Women did become vassals, were integrated into the system, and came to play decisive roles in it, particularly as feudalism began to be transformed. With the disintegration of centralized authority in the ninth century, claims to land by families became easier to assert.

Control and inheritance of land passed from the hands of kings to those of families, and this tended to enrich women as well as men. The system of lineage accepted in some parts of western Europe, in which the line of descent of the familial surname was followed and recognized through female as well as male ancestors, guaranteed family control of land and allowed females, in the absence of male heirs, to inherit property. They held land in their own right and fulfilled the family obligations, including military ones, for the holding of fiefs.

Probably the best-known example of this occurred in the twelfth century, when the vast fiefs of Duke William X in Aquitaine were bequeathed to his daughter Eleanor, who accordingly became the most important vassal of the

king of France, possessing approximately one-third of that sovereign's territory. By the end of the thirteenth century, the rise of towns and the shift of economic and political forces away from the household toward the public sphere probably worked to undermine women's power.

Manorialism

The feudal era was initially a period of insecurity and uncertainty, an era in which trade declined. With that decline came a temporary decline in the importance of large towns and cities. From the ninth to eleventh centuries, large-scale, integrative regional commerce on an international level was sparse in western Europe, limited to exorbitantly expensive luxury goods. Even the petty, localized trade of peddlers was scant. Coinage became localized and nonconvertible. Accordingly, feudal Europe retreated to a self-sufficient, localized, domestic economy until the rise of city-states and empire beginning about the eleventh century. The characteristic unit of this early economic system was the rural manor or estate, and manorialism determined the way in which manors functioned.

Manor Life

The inhabitants of the manor were the landlord, his family, and the people who maintained the manorial economy, the laboring peasants or serfs, who by virtue of their services had use of the land granted to the landlord. There would also most likely be a priest, who attended to the spiritual needs of all the people who lived on the manor, and perhaps a steward or overseer.

A manor was commonly made up of a manor house, where the landlord and his family lived, and a village, where the peasants lived. The land of the manor was divided between the lord's domain and that allotted to the peasants. The pattern of cultivation was traditional and fixed. All arable land was normally laid out into two types of fields, with rotation of crops based on seasonal planting and half the fields commonly left idle or fallow. Fields under cultivation were divided into long, narrow strips, some assigned to peasants, some to the landlord, and some that were called "God's acre" and set aside for the priest. Cultivation was labor-intensive. In many cases, the fields were cooperatively plowed and harvested, with produce being shared proportionately, but some peasants cultivated only their own strips and those of the landlord.

Serfs and Their Obligations

To maintain tenure of the strips assigned to them, serfs owed more than labor service to the landlord. Along with the customary dues and rents, the peasants were obliged to give a percentage of all they harvested to the lord, a tithe to the priest, and perhaps a share to the steward. There were also extra

obligations, such as gifts made to the landlord on certain holidays and other special occasions, and there was additional labor owed, boonwork, such as collecting the lord's firewood or doing other errands for him and maintaining the roads and bridges on the manor. If they wished, lords could arbitrarily impose additional charges on their serfs.

All these obligations were satisfied by labor or produce. The landlord had control of certain products of the manor, known as banalities. They included products of the manorial winepress, gristmill, and oven, which belonged to the lord and which the serfs had no choice but to use and for which use they shared their wine or flour with the lord. Common land was held collectively by the village community, whereas forests, meadows, and waterways were controlled by the lords. Lords held hunting privileges that were denied the peasants, including the right to ride roughshod through fields in pursuit of prey without responsibility for damages.

Landlord Obligations

Landlords did have certain obligations to their serfs. They were obliged to make land or some other means of livelihood available to them, and once all obligations to the landlord were satisfied, peasants were granted what remained of their produce for their own needs. Sometimes landlords also offered peasants aid and support in times of dearth and, on special days, provided them with feasts and celebrations. Landlords were the source of livelihood, however circumscribed, for the servile population of the manor.

In the narrow world of the manor, landlords or their surrogates, the stewards, had the authority of a king or emperor, who was a distant and vague ruler beyond the ken of most peasants. Landlords fulfilled the basic functions of local government for their peasants. They offered protection from external harm and maintained internal peace on the manor when peasants revolted against abuses and unwarranted corruption.

Subordination was emphasized by the lord's control over local justice and by his manipulation of laws and justice in his favor, often at the expense of tenants. Beyond providing protection, landlords generally tried to get as much from their serfs as possible. In some cases, "protection" was afforded in response to threats exorted by the landlord himself in order to frighten peasants into farming for him. In Central France, for example, even manorial priests were so closely identified with the landlords that they ceased to be agents of God in the eyes of the peasants.

The feudal period of western Europe was a time in which personal freedom was severely limited by unequal interdependency. Even so, at a time when there was a conspicuous absence of either political or economic choice, feudal-manorial structures primarily based on personal relationships of labor