

CUET · HISTORY · CLASS XI · CODE 314

The Three Orders

CUET unit: World History — Background

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Snapshot

- Western Europe underwent major socio-economic and political change between the ninth and sixteenth centuries, especially in France and England.
- Feudalism was an economic, legal, social and political relationship organised around land, lords and peasants.
- Society was divided into "three orders" — clergy (first), nobility (second), peasantry (third) — with towns/townpeople emerging as a possible "fourth order".
- Key themes are environmental shifts, agricultural technology (heavy plough, three-field rotation), the fourteenth-century crisis (famine, Black Death, peasants' revolts) and the rise of "new monarchies".
- A standard CUET source for questions on European feudalism, manorial economy, Catholic Church structures, and transition to absolutism.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

- After the fall of the Roman Empire, Germanic peoples occupied Italy, Spain and France; in the absence of unifying political force, social organisation centred on the control of land, drawing from Roman imperial and German customs (NCERT Introduction, p. 86).
- Christianity, the official religion of the Roman Empire from the fourth century, survived the collapse of Rome and the Church became a major landholder and political power in Europe (NCERT Introduction, p. 86).
- Marc Bloch (1886–1944), author of **Feudal Society**, was a key French historian of feudalism who stressed geography and collective behaviour; he was shot by the Nazis in the Second World War (NCERT §An Introduction to Feudalism, p. 86–87).
- The term "feudalism" derives from the German word "feud" meaning "a piece of land"; it describes a society based on the relationship between lords and peasants — peasants cultivated their own land and the lord's land, performed labour services and received military protection (NCERT §An Introduction to Feudalism, p. 87–88).
- Although traced to Roman practices and the age of Charlemagne (742–814), feudalism as an established way of life emerged in the eleventh century (NCERT §An Introduction to Feudalism, p. 88).

- France took its name from the Franks, a Germanic tribe; Frankish kings were Christian, and in 800 Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor (NCERT §France and England, p. 88).
- In the eleventh century, William, Duke of Normandy, crossed the English Channel and defeated the Saxon king; thereafter France and England were often at war (NCERT §England, p. 95–96).
- The Three Orders, as articulated by French priests, were the clergy, the nobility and the peasantry — "some pray, others fight, still others work" (NCERT §The Three Orders, p. 89).
- The nobility (second order) controlled land through vassalage: nobles were vassals of the king, peasants were vassals of nobles; the lord (seigneur) protected the vassal who pledged loyalty, with rituals on the Bible and symbolic transfer of a charter, staff or clod of earth (NCERT §The Second Order, p. 89).
- Nobles enjoyed privileged status — absolute control over property in perpetuity, the right to raise "feudal levies", to hold their own courts and even coin their own money; the noble's house was called a manor (NCERT §The Second Order, p. 89).
- A manorial estate had a manor-house, peasant villages, fields, blacksmiths, carpenters, stonemasons, woodlands, pastures, a church and a castle; in England, castles developed under the feudal system after the Norman Conquest (NCERT §The Manorial Estate, p. 90–91).
- Manors were not fully self-sufficient — salt, millstones, metalware and luxury goods had to come from outside (NCERT §The Manorial Estate, p. 91).
- Knights emerged from the ninth century in response to frequent localised wars; the lord gave the knight a piece of land called a "fief" (1,000 to 2,000 acres or more, inheritable) and in return the knight paid a fee and fought for him (NCERT §The Knights, p. 91).
- The Catholic Church owned land given by rulers, could levy taxes, had its own laws, and was headed by the Pope in Rome; serfs, women and the physically challenged could not become priests, and priests could not marry (NCERT §The First Order: The Clergy, p. 91–92).
- The Church received a tenth share of peasant produce called the "tithe" and endowments from the rich for welfare in the afterlife (NCERT §The First Order, p. 92).
- Monks lived in monasteries/abbeys — examples include St Benedict (Italy, 529) and Cluny in Burgundy (910); abbeys were usually single-sex, and from the thirteenth century, "friars" moved place to place living on charity (NCERT §Monks, p. 92).
- Pilgrimage was important; Chaucer's **Canterbury Tales** describes pilgrims journeying to Canterbury (NCERT §The Church and Society, p. 94).
- Peasants (third order) were of two kinds — free peasants (tenants who paid labour-rent and military service of at least 40 days a year) and serfs (cultivated the lord's

- plots, could not leave the estate without permission, had to use the lord's mill, oven and wine-presses) (NCERT §The Third Order, p. 95).
- The "taille" was a direct tax kings sometimes imposed on peasants; clergy and nobles were exempted (NCERT §The Third Order, p. 95).
 - In England, William I distributed land to 180 Norman nobles who supplied knights to the king; private warfare by knights was forbidden in England (NCERT §England, p. 96).
 - Environmental shift: from the fifth to tenth centuries Europe was forested and cold; from the eleventh century, a warm phase allowed longer growing seasons, easier ploughing and receding of the forest line (NCERT §The Environment, p. 96).
 - New agricultural technology from the eleventh century: iron-tipped heavy ploughs with mould-boards, shoulder-harness replacing neck-harness, iron horseshoes, wind and water mills, and the switch from the two-field to the three-field system — food availability doubled (NCERT §New Agricultural Technology, p. 97–98).
 - The average peasant farm shrank from about 100 acres to 20–30 acres by the thirteenth century, but produced more food; lords increasingly took rent in cash (NCERT §New Agricultural Technology, p. 98).
 - Europe's population rose from about 42 million (1000) to 62 million (1200) to 73 million (1300); towns revived from the eleventh century around fairs, castles, bishops' estates and large churches (NCERT §A Fourth Order? p. 98).
 - "Town air makes free" — a serf who stayed in a town for a year and a day became a free man; bigger towns had populations of about 30,000 and could be considered a "fourth order"; guilds controlled craft quality, price and sale (NCERT §A Fourth Order? p. 99).
 - Cathedrals (large stone churches) were built in France from the twelfth century, financed by donations including from rich merchants, and used stained glass to narrate Bible stories for illiterate viewers (NCERT §Cathedral-towns, p. 100).
 - The fourteenth-century crisis: bitterly cold summers from the late thirteenth century, exhausted soil, shortage of silver from Austria and Serbia (causing debasement of coinage), and the Black Death (1347–50) which killed about 20 per cent of Europe's people, with some places losing 40 per cent (NCERT §The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century, p. 101). Europe's population fell from 73 million (1300) to 45 million (1400) (NCERT §Crisis, p. 102).
 - Wages of agricultural labour rose by as much as 250 per cent in England after the Black Death; lords tried to revive labour-services, provoking peasant revolts — Flanders 1323, France 1358, England 1381 (NCERT §Social Unrest, p. 102).
 - From the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries, "new monarchs" — Louis XI (France), Maximilian (Austria), Henry VII (England), Isabelle and Ferdinand (Spain) — built standing armies, permanent bureaucracies and national taxation; absolutism has been called a "modified form of feudalism" (NCERT §Political Changes, p. 103–104).

- France's Estates-General (clergy, nobility, the rest) met in 1614 and was not summoned for nearly two centuries until 1789; England's Parliament (House of Lords + House of Commons) grew out of the Anglo-Saxon Great Council, and after Charles I's execution monarchy was restored on condition that Parliament met regularly (NCERT §Political Changes, p. 104–105).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Feudalism	From German "feud" (a piece of land); the economic, legal, political and social relationships between lords and peasants in medieval Europe	87–88
Medieval era	The period in European history between the fifth and the fifteenth centuries	87
Vassalage	Practice in which nobles were vassals of the king and peasants were vassals of nobles, exchanging loyalty for protection	89
Seigneur	"Senior" — the lord in a vassalage relationship	89
Manor	The noble's house and the estate on which his peasants lived and worked	89–90
Fief	A piece of land (1,000–2,000 acres or more) given by a lord to a knight; inheritable	91
Abbey / Monastery	Religious community where monks/nuns lived; "abbey" from Syriac abba (father), "monastery" from Greek monos (one who lives alone)	89, 92
Friar	From the thirteenth century, monks who moved from place to place, preaching and living on charity	92
Tithe	Tenth share of peasant produce due to the Church	92
Parish	The area under the supervision of one priest	94
Taille	A direct tax sometimes imposed by kings on peasants; clergy and nobles were exempt	95
Serf	An unfree cultivator tied to the lord's land, who could not leave without permission	95
Guild	Association controlling the quality, price and sale of a craft's product in a town	99
Cathedral	Large stone church built from the twelfth century in France, belonging to monasteries	100
Black Death	Bubonic plague epidemic that hit western Europe between 1347 and 1350	101
Estates-General	French consultative assembly with three houses for clergy, nobility, and "the rest"; met 1614, not summoned again till 1789	104–105

Term	Definition	Page
Marc Bloch	French historian (1886–1944), author of Feudal Society ; emphasised geography and collective behaviour; killed by the Nazis in WWII	86–87
Charlemagne	Frankish king (742–814) crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III in 800	88
William of Normandy	Duke of Normandy who defeated the Saxon king and conquered England (1066); distributed land to 180 Norman nobles	95–96
Knight	Mounted warrior who held a fief from a lord and provided military service	91
St Benedict	Italian saint who founded a famous monastery in 529; the Benedictine order is named after him	92
Cluny	Famous monastery in Burgundy, France, founded in 910	92
Three-field system	Crop rotation under which one of three fields lay fallow each year; introduced from the eleventh century, doubling food output	97–98
Heavy plough	Iron-tipped plough with mould-board, capable of turning heavy northern European soils — central to the agricultural revolution	97
New Monarchies	Centralised states of Louis XI (France), Henry VII (England), Isabelle & Ferdinand (Spain), Maximilian (Austria) — emerged in 15th–16th c.	103–104
Parliament	English consultative body (Lords + Commons), grown out of the Anglo-Saxon Great Council; required to meet regularly after the restoration of Charles II	105
Canterbury Tales	Chaucer's collection of pilgrim narratives — cited as evidence for the importance of pilgrimage	94
Stained glass	Coloured glass windows in cathedrals that narrated Bible stories for the illiterate	100
Holy Roman Emperor	Title revived in 800 when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne	88
Fallow	Land left unploughed in a given year of the three-field rotation, to recover fertility	97
Charter	Document recording the rights and duties of vassal and lord; one of the symbolic items passed during the vassalage ritual	89
House of Lords	Upper chamber of the English Parliament	105
House of Commons	Lower chamber of the English Parliament	105

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Map 1: Western Europe** showing the medieval European setting (p. 87).

- **Early History of France timeline** with key dates: Clovis (481, 486, 496), Charles Martel (714), Pepin (751), Charlemagne (768, 800), Viking raids (840 onwards) (p. 88).
- **Sketch of a manorial estate, England, thirteenth century** showing the layout of fields, houses, church and castle (p. 90).
- **Sketch of an English ploughman, sixteenth century** illustrating peasant agricultural labour (p. 95).
- **Reims cathedral-town map (seventeenth century)** showing the layout of a medieval French town (p. 99).
- **Stained-glass window of Chartres cathedral, France, fifteenth century** (p. 101).
- **Eleventh-to-Fourteenth-Centuries timeline:** 1066 Norman conquest, 1100 onwards cathedrals, 1315–17 Great Famine, 1347–50 Black Death, 1338–1461 Hundred Years War, 1381 Peasants' Revolts (p. 103).
- **New Monarchy timeline:** France 1461–1559, Spain 1474–1556, England 1485–1547 (p. 104).
- **Process — the vassalage ceremony:** (1) the prospective vassal knelt before the lord; (2) placed his hands between the lord's; (3) swore an oath of fealty on the Bible; (4) received a symbolic object — charter, staff or clod of earth — marking the transfer of the fief; (5) the lord in return promised protection. This ritual is what tied each rank of the second order to the next (NCERT §The Second Order, p. 89).
- **Process — the three-field rotation:** Year 1 — field A wheat/rye, field B oats/peas/beans, field C fallow; Year 2 — A oats, B fallow, C wheat; Year 3 — A fallow, B wheat, C oats. The presence of legumes (beans/peas) restored nitrogen, raising yields and supporting larger animal herds (NCERT §New Agricultural Technology, pp. 97–98).
- **Process — chain of fourteenth-century crisis:** cooler summers → poor harvests → Great Famine 1315–17 → weakened population → Black Death 1347–50 kills 20–40% → labour shortage → wage rise 250% in England → lords try to revive serfdom → peasant revolts (Flanders 1323, France 1358 "Jacquerie", England 1381) (NCERT §The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century, pp. 101–102).

2.5 Timeline / Key events

Year / Period	Event	Significance
481 / 486 / 496 CE	Clovis founds Frankish kingdom, defeats Romans, converts to Christianity	Origin of Christian France (NCERT p. 88)
714 CE	Charles Martel becomes Mayor of the Palace	Carolingian rise (NCERT p. 88)
751 CE	Pepin the Short becomes king	Beginning of Carolingian monarchy (NCERT p. 88)

Year / Period	Event	Significance
768–800 CE	Charlemagne; crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III	Peak of the Carolingian empire (NCERT p. 88)
840 onwards	Viking raids on western Europe	Trigger for fortification and castle-building (NCERT p. 88)
11th century	Feudalism crystallises; warm climatic phase begins	Agricultural and demographic expansion (NCERT pp. 88, 96)
1066 CE	William of Normandy defeats Saxons at Battle of Hastings	Norman Conquest of England (NCERT p. 96, 103)
1100 onwards	Cathedrals built in France	New urban-religious architecture (NCERT p. 100, 103)
1200 CE	Europe's population reaches 62 million	Demographic recovery (NCERT p. 98)
13th century onwards	Friars (mendicants) emerge	New form of monasticism (NCERT p. 92)
1300 CE	Population peaks at 73 million	High-water mark of medieval prosperity (NCERT p. 98)
1315–17 CE	Great Famine	First signs of 14th-c. crisis (NCERT p. 103)
1323 CE	Peasants' revolt in Flanders	Pre-Black-Death unrest (NCERT p. 102)
1338–1453 CE	Hundred Years War between England and France	Drained feudal aristocracies (NCERT p. 103)
1347–50 CE	Black Death	20% of Europe dies (NCERT p. 101)
1358 CE	Jacquerie peasants' revolt in France	Post-Black-Death unrest (NCERT p. 102)
1381 CE	Peasants' Revolt in England	Wage demands and end of serfdom (NCERT p. 102)
1400 CE	Population drops to 45 million	Demographic trough (NCERT p. 102)
1461–1559 CE	French "new monarchy" — Louis XI to Henry II	Foundation of absolutism (NCERT p. 104)
1474–1556 CE	Spanish "new monarchy" — Isabelle, Ferdinand, Charles V	Unified Spain emerges (NCERT p. 104)
1485–1547 CE	English "new monarchy" — Henry VII to Henry VIII	Tudor consolidation (NCERT p. 104)
1614 CE	Estates-General last meets before 1789	French representative tradition collapses (NCERT p. 104)

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- The word "feudalism" comes from the German "feud" (a piece of land) — **not** from any French or Latin root.
- "Abbey" is from Syriac **abba** (father); "monastery" is from Greek **monos** (one who lives alone). NTA often swaps these origins.
- The **tithe** is the Church's share (one-tenth of produce); the **taille** is the king's direct tax on peasants. Both clergy and nobles were exempt from taille.
- Knights' land was specifically called a **fief** (not "manor" — the manor was the noble's estate/house).
- The shift was from a **two-field to a three-field** system, not the other way around; the third field lay fallow each year on rotation.
- Pope Leo III crowned **Charlemagne** as Holy Roman Emperor in **800** (not Clovis or Pepin).
- The Black Death hit Europe **1347–50**, killing about **20%** of Europe's population (some places 40%); population fell from 73 million in 1300 to 45 million in 1400.
- Peasant revolts: Flanders 1323, France 1358, England 1381 — easily mixed up by date and place.
- Marc Bloch (1886–1944) is the historian of feudalism — students confuse him with Henri Pirenne or other Annalists. NCERT names only Bloch.
- "New monarchies" emerge in 15th–16th centuries — **before**, not after, the French Revolution (1789). Distractors often place them in the 17th–18th centuries.
- Estates-General had **three** houses (clergy, nobility, "the rest"). The English Parliament had **two** houses (Lords + Commons). Do not swap.
- Norman Conquest of England = **1066**, often confused with the Domesday Book (1086) or earlier Saxon dates.

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This topic is a steady source for CUET (UG) History — typically 4–6 MCQs per year. Past papers have favoured direct definitions (feudalism, fief, tithe, taille, manor), the three-order schema, the agricultural and demographic transitions (two-field vs three-field, population figures), the Black Death's impact, and the rise of "new monarchies" (Louis XI, Henry VII, Isabelle and Ferdinand). Statement-based and match-the-following formats are



especially common here because the topic is rich in technical terms. Full archive: [/pyq/history](#).

