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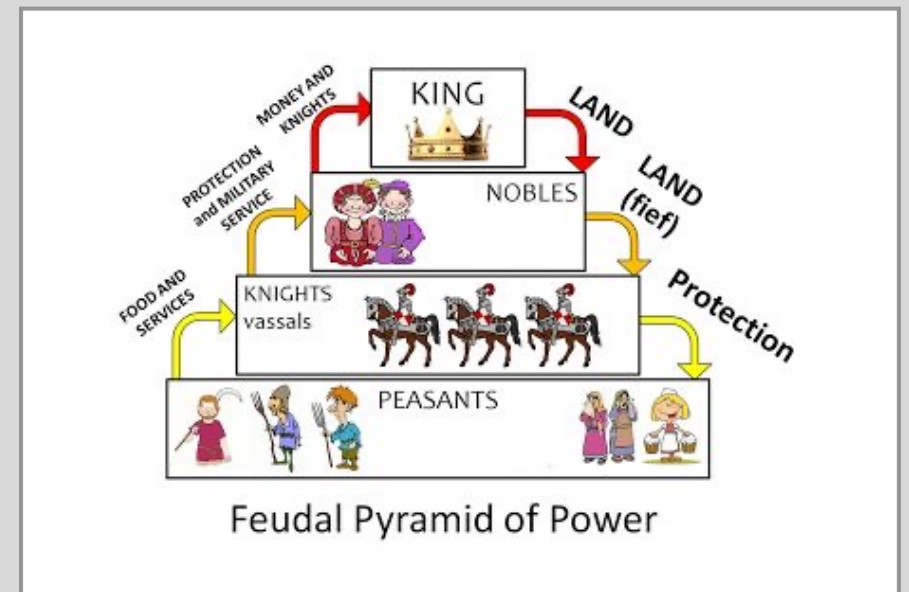
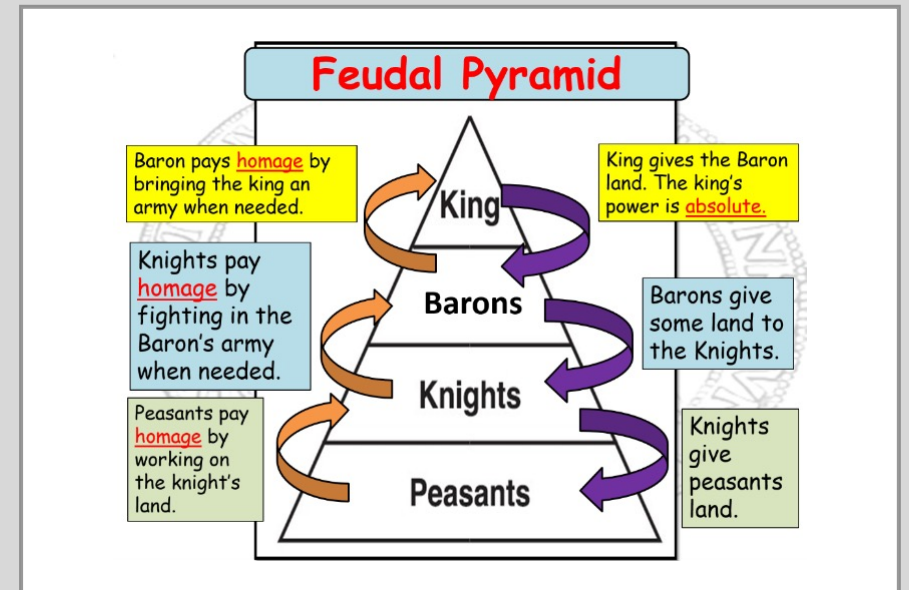
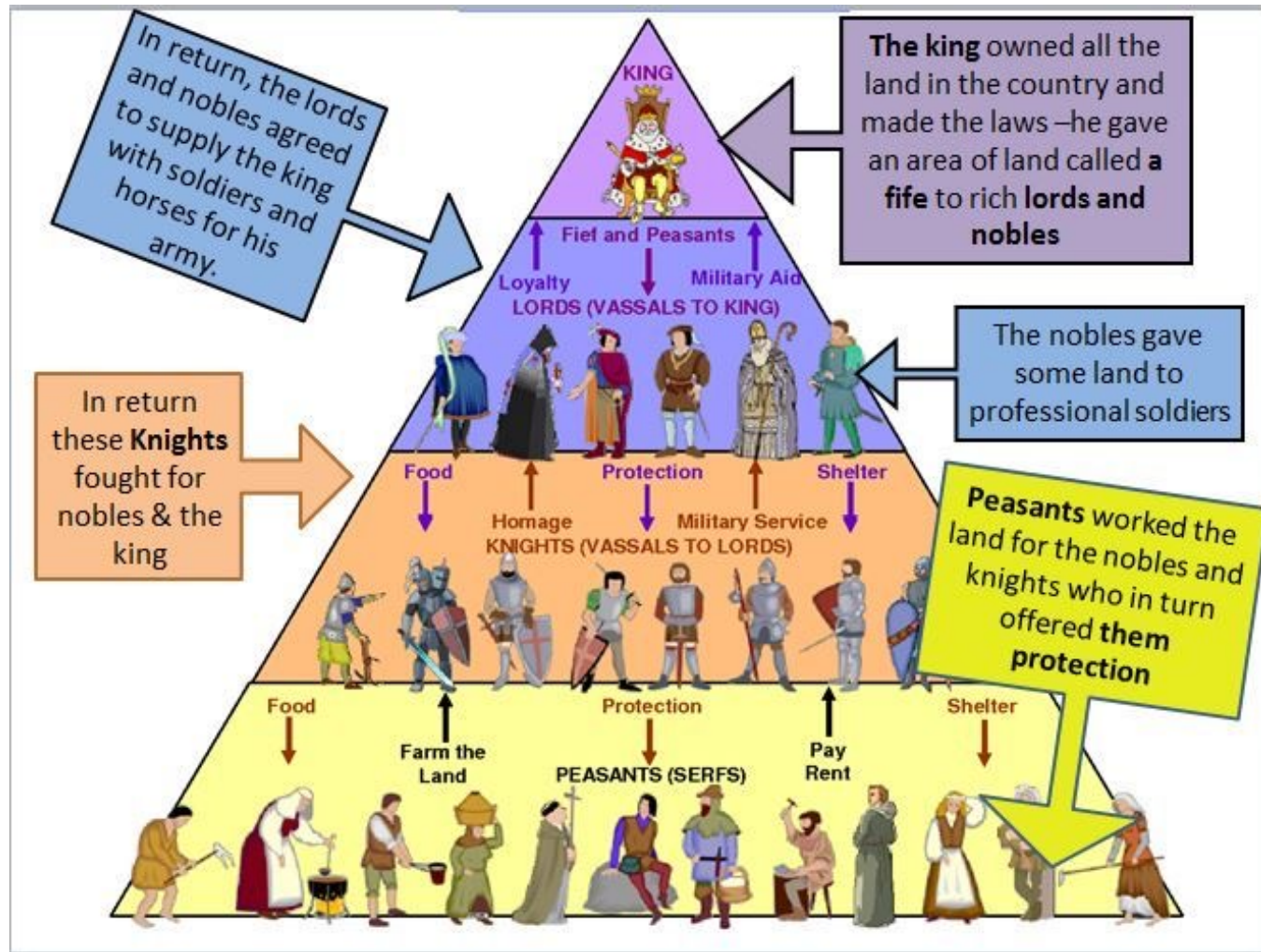
# The “F” Word in Medieval History: Debating Feudalism



# Feodum/feudum (n.)

- Fief or fee
  - What does that mean in English?
    - Property given in exchange for oaths of loyalty and service (often by not always military service)
    - Property over which someone held authority

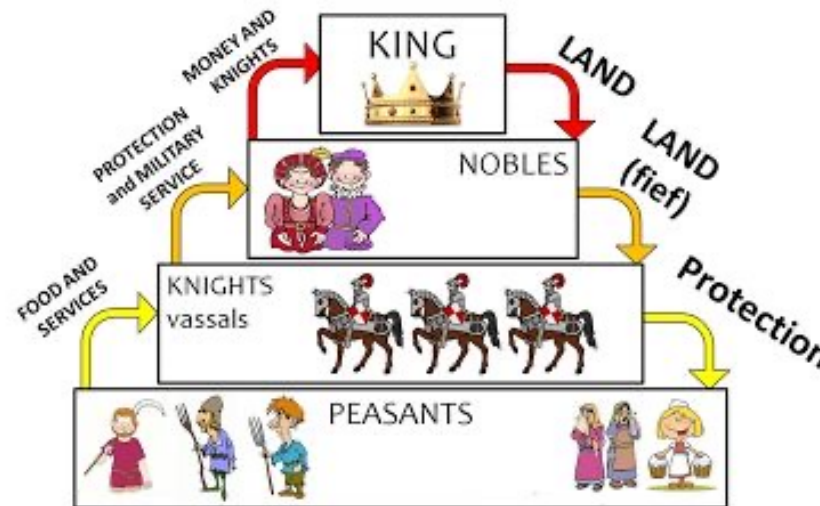




“The *basic* government and society in Europe during the Middle Ages was based around the feudal system”

“The term ‘feudalism’ is used by historians to describe a social-political system which was a *key feature* of medieval Europe”

“Feudalism was the *leading way* of political and economic life in the medieval era”

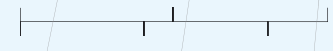
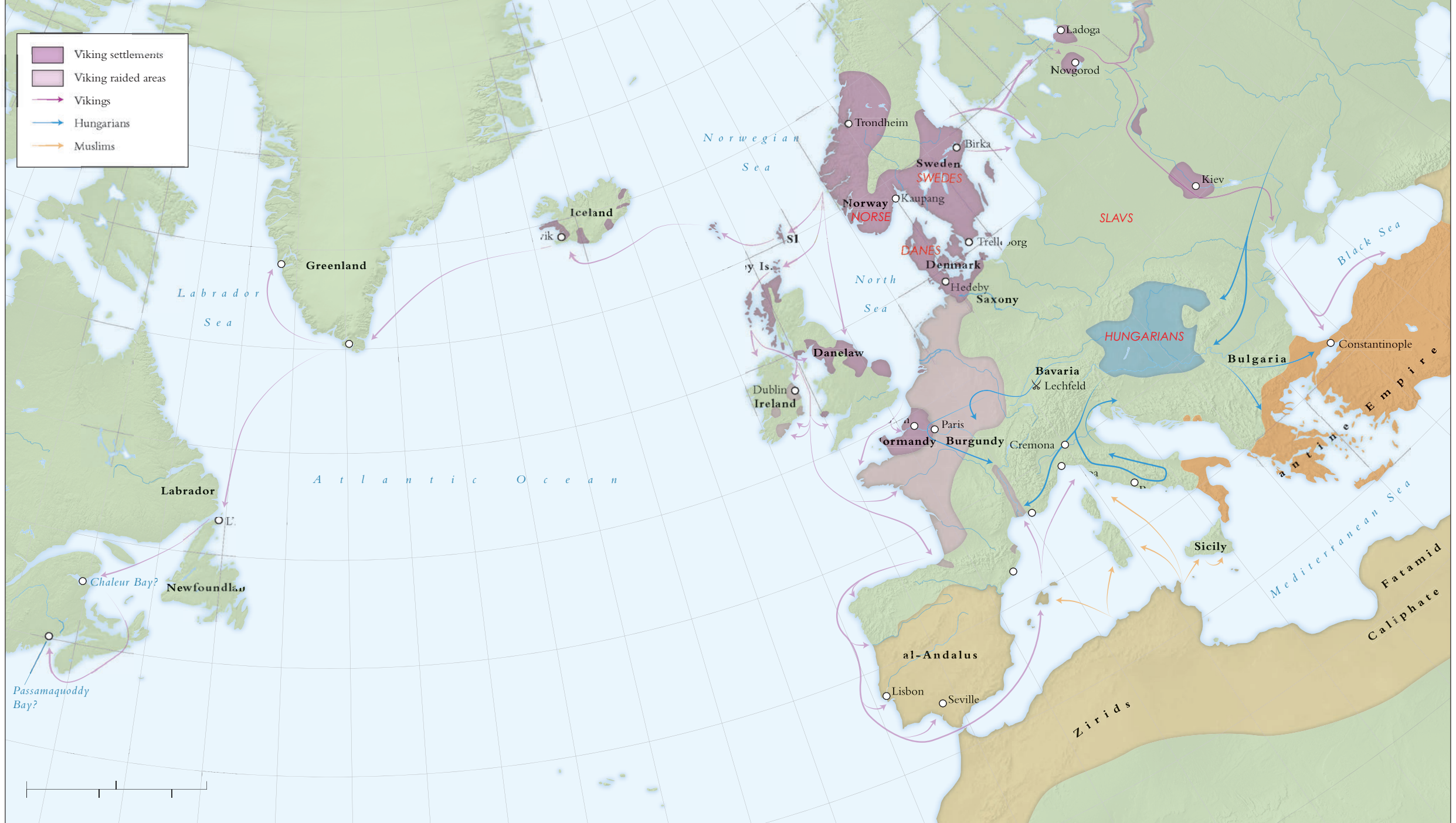


Feudal Pyramid of Power



**Elizabeth A.R. Brown, “Tyranny of a Construct:  
Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe,”  
*American Historical Review* 79.4 (Oct. 1974): 1063-  
1088.**

- Viking settlements
- Viking raided areas
- Vikings
- Hungarians
- Muslims





# Ties of Loyalty/Obligation: Lordship

## LORD

- needs armed knights
- Grants land to men who become vassals



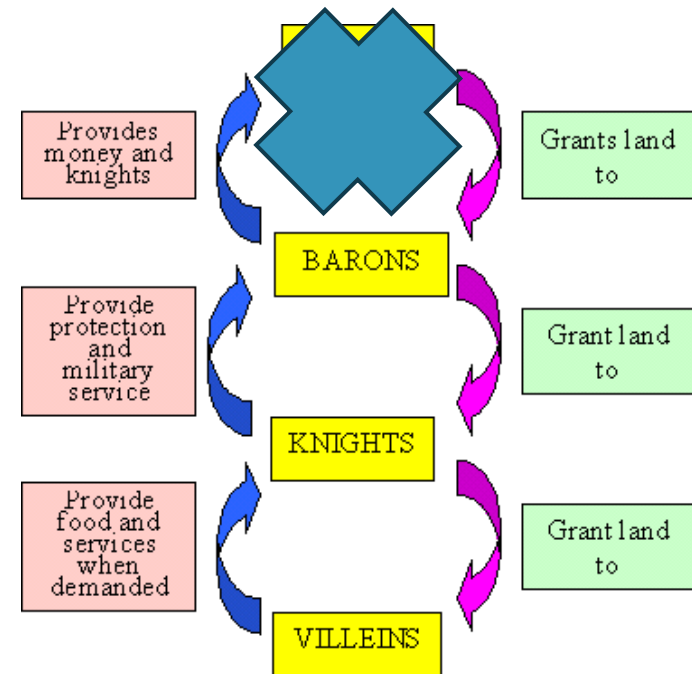
- Provides government
- Provides justice
- Provides other infrastructure

## VASSALS

- Promise military service
- Support household from land and use assets to provide military support to lord

## PEASANTS

- Need protection from raids
- Promise to work land for lord/vassal



**Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages* (4<sup>th</sup> ed. 2014)**

“Ordinarily we may dispense with the word feudalism, though it can be very useful as a ‘fuzzy category’ when contrasting, for example, the political, social, and economic organization of Antiquity with that of the Middle Ages.”

**Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages* (6<sup>th</sup> ed. 2023)**

“In this book, the word feudalism is generally avoided...”