

Freedmen and Serfs

The manorial system was the economic side of medieval life. The lord lived on the manor surrounded by his knights for protection and enriched by the toil of his peasants. Until the 14th century, some peasants, known as serfs, were required to work a certain number of days a year in the lord's fields and to pay rent in the form of produce. In exchange, the serfs were entitled to cultivate land for themselves, and the lord had to protect his serfs from attacks by bandits and the followers of other lords. It was also the duty of the lord of the manor to hear disputes on his manor and to render judgment. Serfs were not free, but they were not slaves either. They could not move from manor to manor, but a lord could not dispossess them. A serf or slave that was granted freedom from his lord was called a freedman.

A few peasants were free. They did not owe service to the lord but only a fixed rent in exchange for land and protection.