Unit 1:1, Medieval Society

1. social Classes
   1. Structure
      1. By the Late Medieval period, there were four classes
         1. Peasants
         2. Bourgeoisie
         3. Clergy
         4. Nobility
      2. This is a change from the earlier Medieval period which only had three
   2. The Peasantry
      1. Most Europeans lived in small farming villages of 5-700 people
      2. Usually connected to manors but not necessarily
      3. Villages filled with windowless, thatch-roofed cottages with dirt floors
         1. Two rooms, maybe an attic
         2. Usually a small livestock barn or a cowshed
         3. Central fire, hearthstone
         4. Poor ventilation
      4. Villages usually also contained several important buildings
         1. Mill
         2. A tavern
         3. A blacksmith
         4. A parish church/chapel
         5. A manor house (if on a manor)
      5. The level of prosperity differed from year to year depending upon weather, political stability, etc. (Rarely was there a full-fledged famine)
      6. Peasant Clothing
         1. Usually wore simple, homespun garments of sturdy fibers
            1. Wool, linen
            2. Undergarments almost always wool
         2. Wooden shoes, with wool slipper-like liners
         3. Major sign of prosperity: leather boots
      7. Peasant appearance
         1. Usually aged rather quickly
         2. Yellowish skin, or very tanned (depending upon weather and nutrition)
         3. Very poor teeth (coarse ground meal, no dental hygiene)
         4. Halitosis
         5. Frequent bouts with ill-health
      8. Diet
         1. Corse, dark bread was the staple of peasant diet
            1. Wheat Germ
            2. Protein
            3. Fiber-rich
            4. Made of barley, rye, millet, wheat, or combination
         2. When poor harvests, or crop failures caused a dearth of grains:
            1. Acorns
            2. Tree bark
            3. Grass seed
            4. Even soil mixed with meal to make it last longer
         3. Rareities
            1. Fruit
            2. Meat
            3. Green, leafy vegetables
         4. Constants:
            1. Bread (see above)
            2. Beans (and other legumes)
            3. Peas, lentils, oats
            4. Fish
            5. Small game
         5. King Henri IV wanted “a chicken in every pot, every Sunday” for his people, that would have been a real improvement
         6. Even so, the diet of the peasantry was really quite healthy when it was prodigious.
      9. Marriage and childbearing
         1. Food always plays a role
         2. Menstruation and Peasant girls
            1. In Northern Europe (poorer nutrition) 17-18 yo for Menarch
            2. Typical in other parts of Europe 12-14 (Normal)
         3. Average Marriage Age (AMA) in Northern Europe: ♀23 ♂30
         4. AMA in more prosperous parts ♀20 ♂25
         5. Explain the population and AMA relationship
         6. High infant mortality rate: average family size 4 children reach adulthood, IMR of 55% in some places, 45% in the best situations
         7. Four generations living contemporary was unheard-of, three living generations was not as common as today
      10. Work
          1. Hard work punctuated with holidays
          2. Men worked the fields, gathered wood, repaired housing and machinery
          3. Children assisted their parents in all activities as soon as they were able, usually after age 7
          4. Women helped the men with plowing, manuring weeding, reaping, and threshing but these were seasonal tasks not day to day
             1. Women were expected to maintain the internal household as well

Maintain fire

Haul water,

Garden

Tend animals

Suckle infants

Cook

* + - * 1. To think the men were sitting about while this was happening would be grossly inaccurate
      1. Women and children would sometimes participate in “cottage industries” as well
         1. Making textiles
         2. Making cheese and butter for sale
      2. Women were very important and very powerful, some 20th century feminist perceptions of history simply do not match the historical evidence
    1. Holidays, Fairs and taxes
       1. Holy Days of Obligation
          1. Only absolutely necessary work was done
          2. Sundays and special feast days
       2. Feasts
          1. Usually based upon a special event in the life of Christ or the Virgin Mary or a particular Saint.
          2. The village would prepare a feast, we would recognize the potluck nature of it
          3. Holy Mass, then dancing, singing, eating, drinking, parades, processions, (repeat)
          4. This could last for several days or just one day.
       3. Fairs and Market days
          1. Allowed the peasants to meet and swap stories, news, and goods
          2. Make extra money selling homemade items etc.
       4. On average a peasant would have 60 holidays and feast days a year, in some places this could be as many as 100!
       5. Taxes
          1. This varied from place to place
          2. On average a peasant could expect to pay 30% of his produce in taxes
          3. This tax burden did not adjust for poor harvest years etc.
          4. This fact could cause revolt
          5. Even so the average American can pay 32-35% of their income in taxes when one adds all the various avenues of taxation
       6. SO, they worked harder, with more days off, about the same taxes, and healthier diets…poor living conditions