



Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted

By Susan Reynolds



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Fiefs and Vassals is a book that will change our view of the medieval world. Offering a fundamental challenge to orthodox conceptions of feudalism, Susan Reynolds argues that the concepts of fiefs and vassalage that have been central to the understanding of medieval society for hundreds of years are in fact based on a misunderstanding of the primary sources.

Reynolds demonstrates convincingly that the ideas of fiefs and vassalage as currently understood, far from being the central structural elements of medieval social and economic relations, are a conceptual lens through which historians have focused the details of medieval life. This lens, according to Reynolds, distorts more than it clarifies. With the lens removed, the realities of medieval life will have the chance to appear as they really are: more various, more individual, more complex, and perhaps richer than has previously been supposed. This is a radical new examination of social relations within the noble class and between lords and their vassals, the distillation of wide-ranging research by a leading medieval historian. It will revolutionize the way we think of the Middle Ages.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Reynolds's argument is detailed and impressive and generally convincing....An important work and so clearly presented that it could be used by upper-division undergraduates."--Choice

From the Back Cover

Fiefs and Vassals sets out to change our view of the medieval world. It offers a fundamental challenge to orthodox conceptions of feudalism. Susan Reynolds argues that the concepts of the fief and of vassalage, as understood by historians of medieval Europe, were constructed by post-medieval scholars from the works of medieval academic lawyers and that they provide a bad guide to the realities of medieval society.

About the Author

Susan Reynolds is Emeritus Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. She is the author of *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (OUP, 1977; CPB 1982), and *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900-1300* (OUP, 1984; CPB 1986).

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