masques might be written and performed for Shrovetide, the three days preceding Ash Wednesday. Unlike the generally apolitical Italian and French comedies and German Fastnachts spiele, which made fun of typical human faults, the English compositions often carried ideological messages supporting the divine right of kings.

The most subversive activity of Carnival probably lay in the custom of "masking," which permitted the social classes to mingle promiscuously in the streets and even to express seditious sentiments under the protection of anonymity. Church authorities periodically forbade masking, but it was tremendously popular. Carnival activities in general became less important during the baroque period and the Enlightenment, although they are still lively today in a few Catholic cities such as Cologne and Venice. It would be hard to prove that they were lastingly subversive of dominant institutions, although their spirit often stood in opposition to official ideology.

See also Carnival; Games and Play.

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FEUDALISM. Strictly speaking, feudalism refers to the medieval dependency/service relationship between lords and their vassals or to the political subordination and service of lesser lords to higher lords or princes. These medieval relationships faded in the early modern centuries as princes developed institutionally complex states and replaced unreliable feudal levies with mercenaries and, eventually, standing armies. Although the proper-
ties of lords and knights, called fiefs, often retained distinct laws that governed their transmission, feudalism in the strict sense survived only as a vestigial institution in the early modern centuries.

What most commentators and detractors called feudalism between 1500 and 1800 was technically lordship. Karl Marx and modern Marxist historians considered feudalism an oppressive economic system, a means of production. While feudalism in some settings assumed the appearances of an economic system, notably in the large noble and ecclesiastical estates of eastern Germany, Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary that were worked by serf labor, feudalism was actually a much broader institution. It was both a fiscal system for the support of the governing classes and a system of local governance. One of the oldest and most durable institutions in European history, feudalism emerged in the early medieval centuries, reproduced and reshaped itself century after century, and spread into newly colonized regions. Retaining many of its medieval features until its violent demise in the wake of major political revolutions, feudalism survived in France until the Revolution of 1789 and in much of central and eastern Europe until the Revolutions of 1848.

FEUDALISM IN THE MIDDLE AGES
In the Middle Ages, feudalism/lordship was the institutional and territorial expression of the unlimited governing authority of lords: princes, high aristocrats, bishops, and abbots. Lords exercised governing authority by birthright or by office, and the inhabitants of the lords’ domains were their subjects. Feudalism expressed itself in many institutions, which, like a fine net, covered the entire landmass of urban centers, rural villages, mountain ranges, rivers, and roads. Feudalism was a fiscal system that supported the governing class. Lords in turn assigned part of their fiscal assets to agents as remuneration for their administrative tasks and to knights for military service. The fiscal burdens of feudalism took any form deemed suitable by the lords: payments in cash, in kind, in labor services, or in military services. There were direct taxes on men and land as well as a variety of indirect taxes such as tolls on rivers or roads and taxes assessed in markets and fairs. Lords collected taxes when property changed hands, mortuary fees when old tenants died, and entrance fees when new tenants assumed possession of landholdings. There were fees for the obligatory use of feudal grain mills, grape and olive presses, and ovens.

Feudalism was also a system of local governance. All-purpose agents of the lords, such as mayors in the villages and towns, not only collected the lord’s taxes but supervised the communal assembly and administered justice with the cooperation of the most notable residents. Above the mayors there were intermediate agents such as provosts, then higher officials often called bailiffs, and a corresponding hierarchy of fiscal, judicial, and administrative offices. At the apex stood the lord with his household and central administration. Although kings and princes such as dukes and counts normally had more extensive and complex lordships than bishops, abbots, barons or lesser lords, these lordships were all remarkably similar.

REGIONAL PATTERNS OF FEUDALISM
Feudalism was absolutely unassailable in law in the early modern centuries. Normally the king or prince himself was the principal lord and still derived significant revenues from his feudal holdings. Rent rolls, urban and village charters, the day-to-day administrative, fiscal, and judicial records of lords, as well as the publicly verifiable custom of the lordships were upheld in both the lowliest and the highest courts. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, judicial officials of kings and princes held public inquiries and assembled written compilations of provincial customary law in France and in the western parts of the Holy Roman Empire, the Netherlands, Spain, and Italy. In Prussia, the codifications appeared later in the eighteenth century. In England, manorial records served the same purpose.

By the beginning of the early modern era, about 1450 or 1500, feudalism already had a thousand years of history behind it in the core lands of the old Roman Empire and at least two or three hundred years in the most recently settled areas. At the end of the Middle Ages there were already distinct regional patterns of feudalism, which became more pronounced between 1500 and 1800. These regional variations affected feudalism mainly as a fiscal system, while feudalism as a system of local government survived almost everywhere in Europe. The feudal systems of Europe in their fiscal expressions fell into three broad zones that extended from west
to east. These regional variations were the result of differences in economic development, population density, and political organization.

The first zone included England, the Netherlands, and the lower Rhineland area of Germany as well as France, Spain, and Italy. This first zone encompassed the most densely populated, the most economically developed, and the most politically advanced areas of Europe. The customary laws viewed the holdings under the feudal authority of lords as secure, usually perpetual, tenures. Consequently, those who actually possessed the land and used it had rights tantamount to property ownership. Lords could not dismiss their tenants and confiscate their property without due cause, such as the failure to pay annual dues for a number of years, and even then only with formal judicial procedures. Likewise, once established, the regular annual feudal taxes were normally viewed as immutable. Kings, princes, and central governments generally reserved for themselves the right to assess new taxes and to increase rates. In most of this part of Europe, serfdom had largely disappeared by 1500. The most common burdens of medieval serfdom had been restrictions on transfer of tenures except in the direct line of succession (mortmain), prohibition of marriage outside the lordship, mandatory residence, and unregulated taxes and labor services. Although remnants of these practices survived here and there, they were largely governed by the provisions of customary law.

Powerful economic forces that emanated from expanding urban centers and international trade produced significant changes in property ownership and land use in this zone in the early modern era, but these changes occurred slowly at a pace measured in generations and even centuries. Nobles, well-to-do urban residents, state officials, and even prosperous peasants bought perpetual tenures near cities, in rural villages, even in remote areas with easy access to commercial routes. From piecemeal purchases of land that often stretched over generations, they assembled large farms and vineyards that produced for the expanding markets. The physical appearance of the landscape changed as consolidated capitalist farms partially replaced peasant villages. Economically, the newly created or expanded farms of the better-off classes were market-oriented, capitalist enterprises worked by tenant farmers or sharecroppers on short-term leases.

Although the new owners of former peasant lands sometimes cleared their lands of the old feudal taxes by paying for their abolition, more often than not they simply stacked short-term market leases over the perpetual tenures. The network of feudal fiscal rights assigned to landed property were so deeply imbedded in law, especially when they belonged to ecclesiastical lords, charitable organizations, or towns, that the old feudal burdens survived but took on an increasingly archaic appearance. In heavily urbanized northern Italy, the partial elimination of the perpetual tenures and the more widespread stacking of short-term renewable leases over preexisting tenures were already very advanced by 1500. Elsewhere, the changes occurred mainly between 1500 and 1750 or 1800. Roughly half the land held by peasant perpetual tenants in 1500 passed into the hands of nonpeasants by the 1780s. In England this process was called enclosure. Enclosure began in the late Middle Ages and peaked in the eighteenth century. Normally, English enclosure brought with it the elimination of the feudal fiscal rights. In the areas of England unaffected by enclosure, feudal tenures, called copyholds, survived until 1922.

The second zone encompassed the most anciently settled core lands of the Holy Roman Empire, those areas that had been settled prior to the thirteenth century, with the notable exception of the lower Rhineland (Cologne, Mainz, the Rhenish Palatinate, etc.), which belonged to the first zone. This zone included Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden, Alsace, Hesse, Brunswick, Saxony, Thuringia, and Franconia. The determining factor here was the modesty or mediocrity of any force, whether demographic, economic, or political, that could have produced significant change. Although there was a dense network of rural villages, the cities and towns were very small and quite undynamic between 1500 and 1800. Most of Germany lay well outside the major trade routes in Europe. Politically the area was fragmented into hundreds of small states.

Feudal estates here consisted of clusters of peasant villages or scattered peasant holdings subject to an array of feudal taxes. Lords rarely had directly held farms of notable size in 1500 or in 1800. The
forces that partially transformed the landscape in the first zone were too weak to produce similar results here. Upper-class investors such as nobles, ecclesiastical institutions, and burghers lent money to peasant tenants and piled new rents on old feudal taxes. They even bought up feudal tenures, often by foreclosing on bad peasant debts. But they did not disturb peasant farming. Although much of the land in many peasant villages near the larger towns technically belonged to burghers who were legally the tenants, the investors almost always immediately retroceded the foreclosed lands to the existing peasant farmers. Capitalist, freestanding farms worked by tenant farmers on short-term leases were very uncommon. In the absence of strong market forces, the short-term leases or life leases that multiplied in the rebuilding of this part of Germany after the Thirty Years’ War faded into perpetual arrangements by the eighteenth century. Lords were content to retain peasants to farm their tenures and pay feudal taxes generation after generation.

The third zone extended eastward along the Baltic from Denmark and Holstein through the German states of Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, and the two Pomeranias to Prussia and then south through Poland, Silesia, Bohemia, and Hungary, ending with Austria and the other possessions of the Habsburgs in the southeastern Alps. This entire zone was very lightly populated and both economically and politically underdeveloped. Central governments of kings and princes were weak, while nobles were comparatively strong and independent. Plagues and ruinous wars repeatedly devastated the fragile network of settlement in this zone between 1300 and 1700. Although the feudal practices here were the same as those in use everywhere in Europe, the whiplash effects of cyclical devastation did not allow feudalism to develop much beyond the stages characteristic of parts of western Europe in the Carolingian era of 750 to 950.

Lords in this third zone, whether princes, ecclesiastical institutions, barons, or knights, had an abundance of land but could find little peasant labor. They made heroic efforts century after century to colonize their lands, but no sooner had settlement begun to produce its first fruits than some fresh calamity undermined it. Out of necessity, lords relied primarily on their own directly held lands to support themselves. Such farms expanded between 1500 and 1800, not principally through consciously planned depopulating enclosure, but because abandoned peasant tenures and entire villages fell back into the hands of the lords. The most heavily damaged regions in the era of the Thirty Year’s War, for example, lost on average half their population.

To work their directly held lands, lords in this zone hired landless day laborers as permanent staff and as temporary wage labor, and they relied on feudal labor services assessed on peasant farmers and cottagers. Normally, lords did not simply impose arbitrary labor services on their existing subjects, but rather offered lands to new colonists with labor services as a condition of tenure. With each new wave of devastation, feudal labor services became more important. To retain labor, lords also multiplied restrictions on the personal movement and land transfers of their subjects. The result was a new form of serfdom, born of insurmountable poverty and underpopulation. It was only after 1750 that the positive pull of markets for grain and livestock had much of an impact on these eastern European forms of feudalism.

FEUDAL COURTS
Everywhere in Europe, lords retained wide rights of local jurisdiction and local governance. Although the polemical literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries painted a very unflattering portrait of the feudal courts, in fact they performed indispensable services as lower courts of first instance with jurisdiction over civil and criminal affairs. They survived because the states had neither the political need to abolish them nor the revenues to replace them. From at least the sixteenth century in the more advanced states and from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries elsewhere, the men who staffed the feudal courts were legally trained professionals who received an annual salary. The feudal courts were incorporated into the judicial hierarchy of the state with rights of appeal in western Europe by 1500 or shortly thereafter, but in Austria, Bohemia, and Brandenburg-Prussia this did not occur until the middle of the eighteenth century. Feudalism also survived as a system of local governance. Feudal officials retained their traditional supervisory role in the administration of the smaller towns and the rural villages, while royal or princely officials usually controlled the important cities.
THE DEMISE OF FEUDALISM
Opposition to the feudal system grew steadily from the middle of the eighteenth century. Peasants had always hated both the system and the tithe, the obligatory feudal tax for the support of the church. While most nobles everywhere understandably defended feudalism, members of the non-noble elite were of two minds. On the one hand, anyone who aspired to assimilation into the nobility routinely purchased feudal rights and estates since they were the socially indispensable prestige properties of the aristocracy. On the other hand, the non-noble elites were increasingly aware that the feudal system and the legal nobility were hopelessly antiquated institutions. Opposition to feudalism among the non-noble elites was based on the overall transformation of society, not on the economic burden of feudalism per se. Consequently, opposition was much more vocal in France and Italy than in Prussia, Austria, or Bohemia.

Enlightened reformers began to eliminate feudalism here and there from the middle of the eighteenth century. The task was monumentally difficult. Rulers such as Frederick II of Prussia could abolish personal serfdom or improve conditions of tenure on their own domain lands, but not on the lands of other lords. Lords had legitimate property rights that could not simply be dismissed without compensation. The reforms began timidly with the removal of restrictions on personal freedom that were degrading but that produced little revenue for the lords. In 1778 Louis XVI of France abolished all forms of serfdom on directly held royal estates and the right of pursuit of serfs for the entire realm. From the 1770s, enlightened rulers in Denmark, Piedmont-Sardinia, and Austria promoted the liquidation of feudal fiscal rights with elaborate and costly schemes to make redemption payments to lords that were financially beyond the means of most peasants. Political revolutions eventually swept aside the remnants of the feudal system.

See also Aristocracy and Gentry; Estates and Country Houses; Landholding; Property; Serfdom in East Central Europe.

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FIELDING, HENRY (1707–1754), English novelist and playwright. Fielding was born 22 April 1707 at Sharpham Park, Somerset, and the family moved to East Stour in Dorset three years later. His father, Edmund, was a lieutenant who was reckless with money, and his mother, Sarah Gould, was a judge’s daughter. Edmund Fielding remarried in 1718 after Sarah’s death, and Fielding was educated at Eton, where he developed a love of the Greek and Roman classics. In 1728, he moved to London, where he published his first work, an ode on King George II’s birthday, a satirical poem, “The Masquerade,” and his first play, Love in Several Masques.

From 1728 to 1729 he studied law at the University of Leiden, but returned to London because his father’s increasing extravagance had left Fielding penniless. He supported himself by writing for the stage; between 1729 and 1737 he wrote twenty-five comedies and satires that were passionately engaged with exposing the vices of the court, politics, and society of the 1720s and 1730s. Fielding’s first success, The Author’s Farce, reflects on his own difficult financial position. In 1734 he married Charlotte Craddock, and they lived in lodgings in the Strand in London with their two children. His other successes at the Little Theatre, Haymarket (which...