



# DECIPHERING A FEUDAL CONTRACT

## Key definitions

- **Lord:** A well-to-do noble who owned a large estate usually with a castle and gave land to vassals in return for military service, who, in turn, used serfs or peasants to farm his land.
- **Vassal:** A noble who was given land by a lord in return for military and other services to his lord.
- **Fief:** Land given by a lord to a vassal in return for military and other services; sometimes called a manor.

## Feudal contract

The following selection is adapted from a feudal contract made in 1110.

### Lord Percival

I, Percival Lord and viscount of Northumbria, acknowledge to my Lord Gilbert abbot of St. Mary of Scarborough that I hold as a fief in Northumbria the following castles and manors .... for all of these fiefs, I swear that I will always be a faithful vassal to thee and I will defend thee, my lord, against all invaders. Moreover, I acknowledge that, as a recognition of the above fiefs, I and my successors ought to come to the monastery of St. Stephen as often as a new abbot shall have been made. And when the abbot shall mount his horse, I and my heirs ought to hold the stirrup. The first time the new abbot enters Northumbria, I will supply him with the best fish and meat and with eggs and cheese and pay for the expense of shoeing his horse. And if I or my sons or their successors do not observe to thee or to thy successors each and all the things declared above, we wish that all the aforesaid fiefs should be handed over to thee and thy successors.

### Lord Gilbert

I, therefore, and the aforesaid Lord Gilbert concede to thee all the castles and manors as a fief. And I promise to thee and thy heirs that I will be a good and faithful lord concerning all those things described above.

1. What does Lord Percival promise in this feudal contract?
2. To whom does Percival owe obligations?
3. What are these obligations, specifically?
4. What can Percival lose if he fails to fulfill his obligations?
5. What does Lord Gilbert give to Percival in this agreement?
6. Does Gilbert promise Percival anything?
7. If either, or both, lords die, how do you know the contract continues?