**Russia Serfdom**



**INTRODUCTION**

Serfdom in Europe can be traced back to the 11th century.  This type of feudalism spanned throughout Europe, declining in Western Europe around the 14th century with the Renaissance, but increasing in Central and Eastern Europe, a phenomenon sometimes known as “later serfdom.”   Serfs -as they were known- in Russia were bonded to their masters in a certain type of modified slavery.

**AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY IN RURAL RUSSIA**

Serfdom, as any form of feudalism, was based on an agrarian economy. Day after day, serfs worked the land of their lords, barely leaving time to cultivate the land allotted to them to take care of their family. The lord’s land was divided by the peasant commune (*obshchina* or *mir*), into large fields worked on a rotation crop system. Each field was divided into strips and each family given so many strips in each field according either to the number of male workers in the family or the number of mouths to feed. It was this control of “their” land which led to the mistaken, but deep-rooted peasant belief that “we belong to the masters but the land is ours.”

**PEASANT SOCIETY AND POLITICS**

The peasantry had a culture of its own, often very different to the French speaking and western educated one of their masters. This culture was based round village life, the seasons of the agricultural year, folklore and the church. Many historians, following commentators like Belinsky or Stepniak (Kravchinsky), have argued that the Orthodox church had little real impact on peasant life, apart from their carrying out the fasts and rituals, and that peasants were superstitious and illiterate and not genuinely religious.

#### **PEASANTS, SERFS, SOLDIERS**

Serfs, as it usually happened in a feudal system, could be conscripted and sent off to war by their lords. In fact, a male serf could be sent into the imperial army as punishment for “insubordination,” and the parameters for this charge were established by the individual serf lords.

Guided History Blog, Boston University adapted

QUESTIONS

1) Compare the culture of serfs and the nobility.

2) Describe serf life in detail.

3) How was a serf's life organized? What work did they mainly do?

4) How did the peasants' view the land they worked on?