

<http://montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article3130>



XXX.1 On feudal laws

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXX. Theory of feudal laws among the Franks, in the relation they have to the establishment of the monarchy -

Publication date: vendredi 7 septembre 2018

Copyright © Montesquieu - Tous droits réservés

I would think there was an imperfection in my work if I passed over in silence an event which has happened once in the world, and which will perhaps never happen again, if I failed to speak of those laws we saw appear in an instant throughout Europe, without coming down from those that were previously known, of those laws that have done infinite good and harm, which have left rights when the domain has been yielded, which by giving to several persons various kinds of seigniorship over the same thing or the same persons have diminished the weight of the entire seigniorship, which have set various limits in overly large dominions, which have produced the rule with an inclination to anarchy, and anarchy with a tendency to order and harmony.

This would require a separate book ; but given the nature of this one, the reader will find these laws here less in the form of a treatise than of an overview.

Feudal laws make a fine spectacle. A venerable oak rises [\[1\]](#) ; the eye sees its foliage from afar, and as it approaches, sees the trunk, but it does not perceive the roots : to find them, one must dig up the ground.

[\[1\]](#) ...*Quantum vertice ad oras ¶Aethereas, tantum radice ad Tartara tendit.* Vergil. ['As far as the top reached towards the heavens, so far did the roots extend into Tartarus' (*Aeneid*, IV, 445-446).]