

Title	"Bastard Feudalism" under the Reign of Edward II
Sub Title	
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Publisher	三田史学会
Publication year	1986
Jtitle	史学 (The historical science). Vol.55, No.2/3 (1986. 1) ,p.156(270)- 156(270)
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	Abstract
Genre	
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00100104-19860100-0156

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“Bastard Feudalism” under the Reign of Edward II

Kazuhiko UEJIMA

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About fifty years ago, K.B.McFarlane wrote his pioneer works on “Bastard Feudalism”, in which he describes the patronage relationship that existed between lords and retainers. Stimulated by his works on this topic, many monographs on medieval noble society have since been published.

Referring to the relevant literature, I attempt to clarify the role of bastard feudalism in the reign of Edward II, a period which corresponds with the early stage of this phenomenon. In particular, I focus on the case of Thomas, earl of Lancaster.

Bastard feudalism, like other social phenomena, reflected the particular age and changed its character with time. In this paper I discuss four questions: (1) How did the system of noble patronage work, and to what degree was it effective for the manipulation of parliamentary seats and royal offices? (2) To what degree was the royal judicial power controlled by the lords? (3) Had the military aspect of bastard feudalism already developed in the reign of Edward II? (4) What was the role of retainers in managing the land of their lords? Did this role change in later ages, and, if so, what was the reason for the change?

The conclusion of this four-point discussion is that a major part of the function of bastard feudalism had already developed by the time of Edward II. There were, however, certain under-developed aspects owing to the immaturity of the administrative system on which it was to rely. Furthermore, its role was not always visible because there still remained the roles played by servants who were not, strictly speaking, retainers until a later age. Therefore, it can be said that bastard feudalism under the reign of Edward II was not identical to that form idealised by K.B.McFarlane.

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