THE FEUDAL MODEL

Definition: A decentralized sociopolitical structure in which a weak monarchy attempts to control the lands of the realm with regional leaders.

The characteristics of a feudal society are:
- A decentralized administration indicative of weakened monarchical control (including an ineffective or nonexistent bureaucracy)
- Regional leaders (members of an aristocratic warrior-elite) who receive land for use (economic exploitation [the collection of taxes] and jurisdictional authority [law courts] over large territories)
- The receipt of these lands in exchange for loyalty oaths and military support of the monarch
- Feudalism exists only in the presence of a nominal central ruler with limited power. Fully developed feudal systems developed when it was not possible to sustain more centralized political forms.
- Feudal states include a system of land management wherein a monarch awards land use to a subordinate regional leader in return for a pledge of loyalty and military support. Additionally, the regional leader acts as a local governor, collecting taxes and tribute, maintaining judicial authority, and organizing local military units. The lands received are populated by peasants or commoners whose production financially supports the regional leader. In some cases, regional leaders reapportion lands to their own loyal followers, who become leaders of smaller areas; this process is called subinfeudation. In times of war, the monarch calls on the feudally obligated regional leaders (the aristocratic warrior-elite) to assemble with their vassals and fulfill their obligations of military aid.

FEUDAL SYSTEMS: Europe c.900-1100 / Japan c.1200-1600 / [China c.900-400 B.C.E.]

EUROPE
- The feudal structure emerged after the invasions of the 9th and 10th centuries spurred decentralization and regionalism, especially in France
- In general, European feudalism consisted of the awarding of lands, called fiefs, to regional leaders by the king, who received oaths of loyalty and military support in return. The one who granted land was a lord, and the one who received land was a vassal.
- A fief could include large agricultural lands (and the peasants and serfs who worked them), towns, villages, or even church properties.
- The vassal was expected to support the lord’s interests on and off the battlefield. In return, the lord represented the vassal before the law or in social matters, such as arranging marriages. Vassals usually fell under the legal jurisdiction of their lords.
- The granting of fiefs was carefully orchestrated with family and kin groups. Many regional vassals kept tight control of lands by giving fiefs only to family members or to the church, whose officials could not leave church lands to heirs.
- **European Feudalism was a complicated system of rights and privileges, as well as of land use.**
- European monarchs pressed for centralization in the 11th century and supported growing bureaucracies that regained control of revenues and governance.
Early medieval society

A. Organizing a decentralized state
   1. After Carolingian empire dissolved, local nobles built decentralized states
   2. Lords and retainers
      a. Lord provided retainer with a grant known as a benefice (usually land, called fief)
      b. Enabled retainer to devote time and energy to serve the lord
      c. Provided resources to maintain horses and military equipment
      d. Retainers owed lord loyalty, obedience, respect, counsel, and military service
      e. Lord/retainer relationships become stronger; retainer status became hereditary
   3. Potential for instability
      a. Multi-tiered network of lord-retainer relationships
      b. Sometimes conflicting loyalties led to instability
      c. But powerful states were built on foundation of lord-retainer relationships

B. Serfs and manors
   1. Serfs
      a. Slaves and peasants took agricultural tasks and frequently intermarried
      b. Free peasants often turned themselves and their lands over to a lord for protection
      c. Serfs as an intermediate category emerged about the mid-seventh century
   2. Serfs' obligations
      a. Labor service and rents in kind
      b. Could not move to other lands without permission
      c. Once their obligations were fulfilled, serfs had right to work on land and pass it to heirs
   3. Manors were a principal form of agricultural organization
      a. A manor was a large estate, controlled by the lord and his deputies
      b. Manors were largely self-sufficient communities

C. The economy of early medieval Europe
   1. Agriculture production suffered from repeated invasions
   2. Heavy plows
      a. Heavy plows appeared in the sixth century; could turn heavy northern soils
      b. Became common from the eighth century; production increased
      c. Cultivation of new lands; watermills; and rotating crops
   3. Rural society--agricultural surplus not enough to support large cities
   4. Mediterranean trade--Italian and Spanish merchants trade with Muslims
   5. Norse merchant mariners in North and Baltic Seas
      a. Followed routes of Vikings
      b. Traded actively with Byzantine and Abbasid empires
      c. Imported Abbasid silver used in European coinage
   6. Population: 36 million in 200; down to 26 million in 600; back up to 36 million in 1000