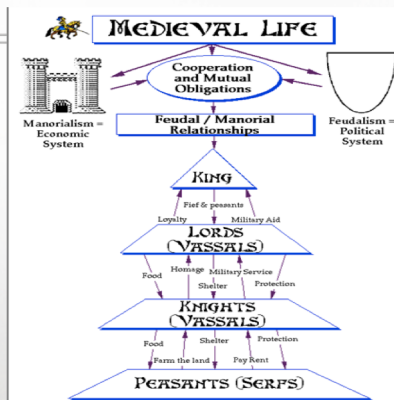# SSWH7: ANALYZE EUROPEAN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY WITH REGARD TO CULTURE, POLITICS, SOCIETY, AND ECONOMICS

*Element A: Explain the manorial system and feudal relationships, include: the status of peasants and feudal monarchies and the importance of Charlemagne*

# CHARLEMAGNE

- The last Latin speaking emperor lost power in Rome in 476 CE.
    - After this, centralized political authority, long distance trade, urbanization, and literacy slowly declined in Western Europe.
    - Germanic tribes flooded into the region and established hundreds of small kingdoms and tribal chiefdoms.
        - The political authority in these kingdoms tended to be very weak, based mostly on the king or another strong man's ability to provide protection.
            - Borders and thrones shifted often as war between and within kingdoms was common.
- A semblance of political unity and cultural revival emerged under the Carolingian Dynasty of the Franks from about 751 to 814.
    - The Carolingian kings gained and expanded their power through an alliance with the Roman Catholic Church.
        - The pope crowned the first Carolingian King, Pepin, the "king by grace of God."
            - This act established a tradition that long endured in Europe in which the pope claimed the right to confer secular political power on kings.
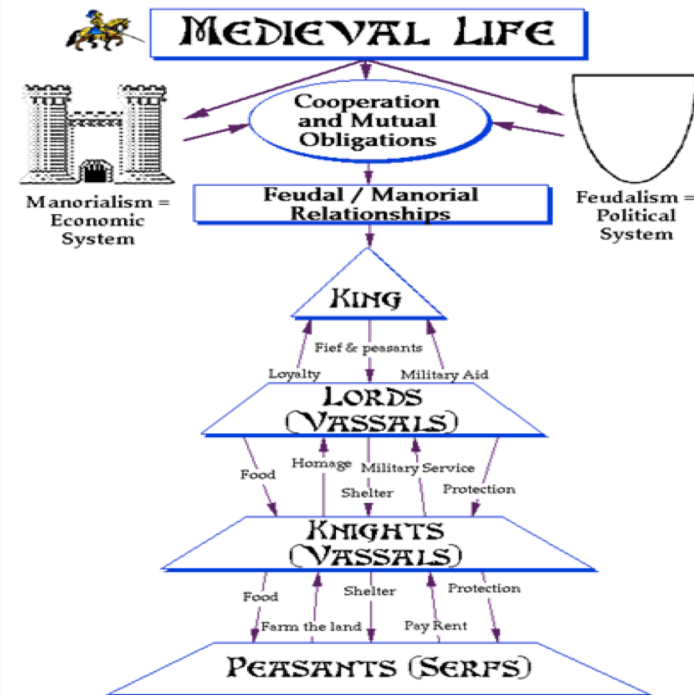
# CHARLEMAGNE



☐ Carolingian power reached its peak under Charlemagne who built an empire that spanned most of Central Europe.

- The pope re-enforced this power by crowning Charlemagne the "Roman Emperor" in 800.
- Under Charlemagne, Europe briefly enjoyed a level of political unity that had been unseen since the fall of Rome.
- Charlemagne also fostered a modest intellectual revival by sponsoring the creation of schools.
  - Weak leadership by Charlemagne's heirs reversed much of this centralization and cultural revival and Europe became a largely feudal society in the years after his death in 814.
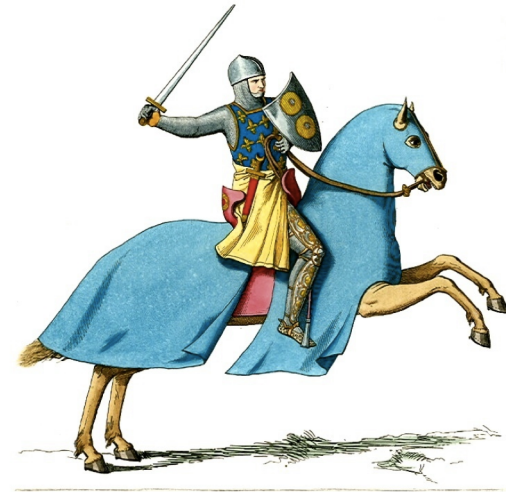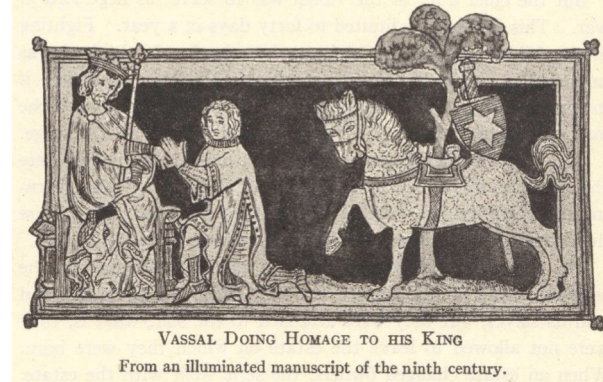
# FEUDALISM

❑ Feudalism took shape slowly and varied greatly from place to place.

- ▪ Historians of the past overly simplified the institution into a strict pyramid shaped hierarchy in which kings granted lands to nobles who in turn granted lands to knights in exchange for oaths of loyalty and promises of military service.

- ▪ While essence of these description is generally accurate, most modern historians see it as a gross simplification of a system that would be more accurately described as a web.

# FEUDALISM

❑ At its most basic level, feudalism was a system that linked landholding with military service.

- ▪ Kings did grant land (called fiefs) to vassal in exchange for military service and oaths of loyalty.
- ▪ The land grants might be quite large, made to a lord who also received a title of nobility like duke or marquees.
- ▪ The land grants might also be small to a knight who served in the king's personal army.
  - • Recipients of large land grants might in turn grant out fiefs to lesser nobles or knights who served in their personal army.
- ▪ It was not uncommon for kings, nobles and knights to be vassal to more than one lord having received land grants and possibly even titles from more than one person.
- ▪ The system became more complicated as it became hereditary over time.
  - • Titles of nobility and the fiefs associated with the title might pass from one family to another through marriage.



VASSAL DOING HOMAGE TO HIS KING
From an illuminated manuscript of the ninth century.

# MANORIALISM



❑ The original inhabitants of the land granted to these vassals became serfs in most of Europe.
- As a serf they were legally bound to the land and obliged to work as farmers for the lord.
- In other areas these inhabitants might be free peasant farmers who were free to leave but generally had no incentive to do so.

❑ Under feudalism Europe became highly decentralized.
- While long distance trade never completely disappeared, it was greatly reduced as the old Roman system of roads fell into disrepair.
  - This decentralization forced much of Europe to become largely self-sufficient.
    - Each feudal lord maintained a manor on which most if not all of the basic necessities of life were produced.
    - The term manor is used to describe this self-sufficient economic system that developed on the feudal lord's fief.
    - The typical manor included the lord's manor house, a church, workshops, a mill, a village of cottages for peasants or serfs, pastures for livestock and farmland.
    - The peasants or serfs were obligated to provide labor to the lord and pay taxes while the lord was obligated to maintain order, provide housing and protect to the inhabitants of his manor.



French Manor c. 1400