

SECTION 1

HISTORICAL POLITICAL SYSTEMS

■ TEXT SUMMARY

In response to the chaos in Europe after the fall of Rome, the system of **feudalism** developed. Under a feudal system, government was based on a network of personal relationships between powerful lords and their **vassals**. The lord gave land and protection to his vassals, and expected loyalty and service in return. At the bottom of this system were the **serfs**, who were bound to their land and had no say in the system.

Feudalism worked well in Europe while the economy was simple and the society's values were fairly uniform. But eventually cities grew, the economy became more complex, and the Protestant Reformation led to widespread upheaval, leading to the Thirty Years' War. Feudalism could not cope with these shocks. It became clear

that Europeans needed stronger central governments and clearly defined sovereign states. Kings and queens, because of their strong position in the feudal system, were recognized as the leaders of their states.

The new central governments became even more powerful by adopting **mercantilism**, which was a policy that foreign trade ought to increase the wealth of the state. Mercantilism was important as the European states established colonies in the New World, since the colonies represented new markets for the home country's trade. Since only the state could set up new colonies, this made the state's role even more important.

THE BIG IDEA

As cities grew and trade increased, feudalism led to modern, sovereign states.

■ GRAPHIC SUMMARY: *Feudalism and Sovereignty*

Feudalism	Sovereign States
• Followed the fall of the Roman Empire	• Began with Peace of Westphalia in 1648
• Weak monarch	• Strong monarch
• Weak sense of boundaries, multiple rulers over land	• Defined boundaries for countries
• Basic economy built on labor, local goods, and barter	• Complex economy with trade, cities, and money

Sovereign states replaced the feudal system in Western Europe.

■ REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did kings and queens pursue mercantilist policies?
2. **Chart Skills** What are the main differences between a feudal system and a sovereign government?