

Summer Homework: Chapter Eight
The Carolingian World: Europe in the Early Middle Ages

Bibliography:

McKay, John P., Bennett D. Hill, and John Buckler. "The Carolingian World: Europe in the Early Middle Ages." *A History of Western Society*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2003. 235-61. Print.

Introduction:

Charles Martel defeated the Muslims at the Battle of Poitiers in 732. The Christians saw this victory as the greatest battle in history, as it halted Muslim expansion on the European continent. In 843, Martel's three grandsons came up with the Treaty of Verdun, which divided the continent among them. In the hundred years between these two events, feudalism became the way of European society. For the first time since the Roman Empire most of Europe was unified, and this peaked during the reign of Charlemagne.

Key Terms:

civitas
comites
Frank
capitularies
mayor of the palace
anointment
missi dominici
political Augustinianism
double monastery
miniscule
vassals
serfs
slaves
boyars

Questions:

How did Merovingian and Carolingian rulers govern their kingdoms and empire?

What was the significance of the relations between Carolingian rulers and the church?

The culture of the Carolingian Empire has been described as the "first European civilization." What does this mean?

What factors contributed to the disintegration of the Carolingian Empire?

In a society wracked with constant war and violence, what medical care was available?

Consider to some of the historical problems related to the word *feudalism*.

How did Viking expansion lead to the establishment of the Kievan principality?

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Chapter Notes:

The Frankish Kingdom and the Emergence of the Carolingians

The Frankish king, Clovis, was successful because of:

- ❖ military victories over other Germanic tribes
- ❖ acquirement of the wealthy provinces of Roman Gaul
- ❖ conversion to Christianity
 - supported by bishops in Gaul and the Roman papacy

When Clovis died, he divided his holdings among his four sons, making sure each piece produced roughly the same amount of revenue. Merovingian Gaul was scarred by civil wars and political instability as his descendants fought amongst themselves. These wars mainly started because of:

- ❖ a reported death of a king
 - Merovingian succession unclear
 - anyone could try for the throne
- ❖ desire for new lands
 - warriors allied with those who promised the most land
 - armies wanted to acquire wealth

Royal women during this time were able to have power and influence, based on their diplomatic importance. Marriages controlled alliances and wives produced and guided heirs as well as controlled the treasury. Examples of this power include:

- ❖ King Chilperic I and Fredegunda
 - king murdered
 - wife controlled treasury
- ❖ King Sigebert and Brunhilda
 - Brunhilda said to have murdered twelve
 - went to war with Chilperic after his first wife was murdered
 - Brunhilda had power over her offspring's thrones and ruled Burgundy

Civitas, the city and nearby area, were the basis for the Frankish administrative system and a comites, later called a count, made sure everything ran smoothly. Jobs of comites included:

- ❖ collecting revenue
- ❖ hearing lawsuits
- ❖ enforcing rules
- ❖ maintaining troops

A ruler's source of income came from:

- ❖ money from estates
- ❖ hospitality while travelling
- ❖ the conquest and acquiring of new lands
- ❖ tribute paid by subjects
- ❖ taxes
 - practice slowly declined

Merovingian, Carolingian, and other rulers travelled often in order to ensure all was well in their kingdoms. Some relied on bishops and comites to spread information while the Franks also had dukes to control the militaries.

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Capitularies were issued by Clovis and his successors and were laws organized into chapters or articles. They were influenced by aspects of Roman law and tried to regulate many of the negative sides of Merovingian society.

The Merovingian court also included members familiar with Latin such as:

- ❖ scribes
- ❖ legal officials
- ❖ treasury agents
- ❖ mayor of the palace
 - leader when king is absent
 - usually part of wealthy family

Kings discussed with members of the upper class, which consisted of both Frankish and Gallo-Roman leadership. They made up the royal courts and often lived lavishly for the time period. This aristocracy eventually led to the end of the Merovingian dynasty and the beginning of the Carolingian period.

The Carolingian era took place for many reasons, including:

- ❖ Pippin I and descendants became mayor of palace
 - head of bureaucracy
 - governed if king was gone
 - power and influence
- ❖ alliances through marriages
 - Pippin II
 - acquired land and wealth through marriages
- ❖ military victories
 - victory over King Theuderich
 - shows Carolingian supremacy and power
 - Charles Martel leads successful wars against other areas
- ❖ Carolingians were supported by the church
 - preached Christianity to pagans and reorganized the Frankish Church
 - Saint Boniface
 - helped establish abbey of Fulda
 - established archdiocese of Mainz
 - held church councils
 - promoted *The Rule of Saint Benedict*
 - unsuccessful
- ❖ Pippin had real power over Franks
 - Pope Zacharias found that the man in power should be known as the king
 - Lombard expansion threatened the papacy
- ❖ Lombards threatened the papacy
 - Pippin agreed to help Pope Stephen II
 - alliances between Franks and papacy began
 - Pippin anointed
 - set apart from normal kings of the time
- ❖ Charlemagne also allied with Pope Leo III
 - visited Rome in 800
 - imperial coronation

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Not all is known about this coronation, but some things are certain, including:

- ❖ Charlemagne became the Holy Roman Emperor
 - thought himself a “Christian king ruling a Christian people”
 - preserved and spread old Roman imperial ideals
 - the motto of the time was “Revival of the Roman Empire”
 - the government had a mix of Frankish and Christian customs
- ❖ later German rulers wished to have the title of Holy Roman Emperor
 - used ideology of imperial Rome to strengthen their positions
- ❖ the event proved the relationship between power and the church
 - imperial crown was granted by the pope

The Empire of Charlemagne

Charlemagne, also known as Charles the Great, was known for both his crude brutality and his high intelligence. He enjoyed literature and spoke well; it is debated, however, if he was able to write.

In order to continue his dynasty, Charlemagne needed heirs to the throne. Due to high infant mortality rates, he needed many sons- and many wives. He had four wives and six concubines, but only three sons surviving to adulthood; only one of these sons and four grandsons lived longer than the great ruler.

Charlemagne became one of the greatest warriors of his time. Through more than fifty campaigns, the following occurred:

- ❖ he restrained what is now northern France
- ❖ those in Aquitaine fought off his efforts of conquest
- ❖ the Muslims in Spain were kept in check by fortified areas known as marches
- ❖ northwestern German tribes were added to the kingdom after a war with the Saxons that lasted three decades
- ❖ Lombardy became part of the kingdom
- ❖ the Byzantines were fought and Charlemagne temporarily gained control of Venetia, Istria, and Dalmatia
- ❖ an attempt was made to occupy Basque territory
 - his rear guard was annihilated at Roncevalles
 - Count Roland fought against Charlemagne
 - Charlemagne’s only defeat
 - leads to “The Song of Roland” being written over three centuries later
 - Roland portrayed as ideal knight
 - Charlemagne portrayed as exercising a sacred kingship
 - shows popular opinion of Charlemagne in later centuries

By the year 805 Charlemagne’s kingdom controlled all of northwestern Europe, except for Scandinavia. His holdings were home to many different people and tribes. Almost everyone in the area (excluding Jews, warrior-aristocrats, and clergy) worked in agriculture. Trade and commerce were a very small part of the economy.

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Charlemagne worked to meet the ideal that “a king should be strong against his enemies, humble to Christians, feared by pagans, loved by the poor and judicious in counsel and maintaining justice.” He hoped to awe his new subjects through the use of:

- ❖ military expeditions
- ❖ peaceful travel
- ❖ personal appearances
- ❖ his forceful personality

He also tried to grow in the favor of lesser lords by taking the estates of powerful territorial lords, including land and goods.

The political power of the Carolingians rested upon the Frankish aristocracy. The Carolingians had come from such nobility and this class’ support in exchange for land and wealth helped add to the success of these kings.

Charlemagne divided his empire into counties, similar to the Merovingian civities. Each county was run by a count, or in his absence, a viscount. Counts were responsible for:

- ❖ publishing royal orders
- ❖ resolving legal cases
- ❖ collecting taxes and tolls
- ❖ raising troops
- ❖ supervised maintenance of roads and bridges

Charlemagne appointed officials called missi dominici, who were “agents of the lord king.” Each year two missi, usually a count and a bishop or an abbot, visited assigned districts and investigated.

Some influential Carolingians had vigorous political ideas; many abbots and bishops came up with a political ideology. A king was granted power by God but expected to obey the same laws as everyone else. They wanted a unified Christian society presided over by a king in charge of maintaining peace justice, without which neither ruler nor kingdom had any justification. These ideas were much different than St. Augustine’s theories of kingship and have been labeled political Augustinism.

The Carolingian Intellectual Revival

Charlemagne gave stimulus to scholarship and learning, inspired by intellectual developments in Northumbria.

Despite the victory of the Roman Christian liturgy at the Synod of Whitby in 664, Irish-Celtic culture in Britain still led to more artistic and intellectual activity. Saint Benedict Biscop brought back manuscripts from Italy and created a library in Northumbria, Monasteries also many works, including:

- ❖ missals
 - used for celebration of the Mass
- ❖ psalters
 - included multiple psalms
- ❖ commentaries on the Scriptures
- ❖ illuminated manuscripts
- ❖ law codes
- ❖ letters and sermons

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The most prominent piece of literature created during this time period was the Gospel book. Aspects of many cultures can be seen in this piece, suggesting that many scribes, artists, and illuminators had a hand in its creation.

Women in Gaul and Anglo-Saxon England were also part of the work of evangelization. Families belonging to higher founded monasteries and double monasteries for their unmarried daughters, who became nuns.

The most famous abbes, or superior nun at a monastery, was Saint Hilda. Saint Hilda is known for many things, including:

- ❖ ruling the double monastery of Whitby
- ❖ advising royalty
- ❖ hosting the synod of 664
- ❖ encouraging scholars and poets

The best representation of Northumbrian scholarship was the Venerable Beade. He was sent to Benet Biscop's monasteries and came in contact with many works of literature. He is known for his work on early British history in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Because of him, a more current system of dating events that used A.D and B.C was popularized as well.

Around the same time as these events transpired, another Northumbrian monk was writing *Beowulf*, the only native English epic. The close ties between England and the Scandinavian lands of Sweden and Denmark were implied in this work, as the setting of the story was located in these areas.

The large water sources of the land provided those in Northumbria with an ample supply of fish, and thus hunger was not a huge issue; the winters, however, could be harsh and made life more difficult.

Starting in the seventh and eighth centuries, a new cultural tradition, the Carolingian Renaissance, emerged and emphasized Christian sources and education. Charlemagne promoted the education of clergy members and also wanted boys to be educated on how to properly pray and praise God.

Charlemagne assembled educated men from diverse areas of the kingdom, the most important being a man named Alcuin. Alcuin is remembered for:

- ❖ being Charlemagne's chief advisor
 - 781-804
- ❖ preparing official documents
- ❖ writing "models" for appropriate behavior

Scholars also copied books in what was known as "caroline miniscule," a precursor to the Roman font commonly used today. More materials during this time led to a spread of learning as more books were created. Language and dialects spoken made verbal communication difficult, but the fact that many books were written in Latin made communication and this spread of learning easier.

Medical practice in the early Middle Ages consisted of drug and prescription therapy. Common remedies were said to rid a person of lice, fleas, and eye problems, among other things. Knowing this suggests that parasites and eye problems were common during this period. Infection was also common, putting pregnant women and their children at a high risk. Open wounds could also prove to be lethal, as they could lead to gangrene.

As the church was concerned with both physical and mental suffering, many church fathers during the Carolingian era had an interest in medicine. The foundation of a school at Salerno in Southern Italy

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helped medical studies; physicians including Obadiah ben Abraham were able to travel to the school from various parts of Europe and the Mediterranean and study there.

Only the well-off were able to afford one of the few physicians of the time; most people relied on folk medicine. Early deaths were common, and someone over the age of forty was considered to be old.

Aristocratic Resurgence

Charlemagne left his empire to his only surviving son, Louis the Pious. Initially, he was a tough leader like his father but this changed around the year 821. In 817, he drew up the *Arrangement of the Empire*, which divided the empire among his three sons. The sons fought each other until the creation of the Treaty of Verdun in 843, which:

- ❖ allowed Louis's oldest son, Lothar, to keep the title of emperor and granted him control of the "middle kingdom"
- ❖ granted Louis the German the "eastern kingdom"
- ❖ gave the "western kingdom" to Charles the Bald

Historians once blamed wars between Louis the Pious's ancestors as the cause of the end of the Carolingian dynasty, although newer research puts some of the blame on the revolts of magnates. Sometimes nobles used a disaffected member of the royal family, as in the instance of Carloman.

While Charlemagne tried to prevent the job of being a count from being hereditary, this was commonly the case in the ninth century. Furthermore, some families gained control of so much land that they could resist the authority of the king.

Feudalism and the Historians

The term feudalism became popular in the nineteenth century; because of this historians are still trying to find an exact definition applicable to the Middle Ages.

Feudalism draws attention to the fief, an estate granted by a superior to those who work for them. Lords were the superiors while vassals worked for the lord. Feudalism was not always the same during the Middle Ages, however; changes occurred between the ninth and fifteenth centuries and characteristics varied by location.

Two broad interpretations of feudalism have conditioned medievalists' thinking. Marc Bloch published *Feudal Society* in the 1940s and he believed that feudalism was an entire way of life. The other interpretation saw feudalism as a type of government and focused on the period between the tenth century and the fourteenth century.

Two theories concerning feudalism's beginning have been discussed:

- ❖ powerful Carolingian men needed bodyguards and armed men on horseback
 - caused after the stirrup arrives from China
- ❖ Charles Martel purchased support and loyalty from vassals
 - lesser vassals, or knights, had no political power
 - not part of the noble class
 - counts formed the second level of feudalism
 - more power because Carolingian empire was weakening
 - kings could not handle local problems

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Men were dominant in feudal society, as physical strength, fighting skill, and bravery were all dominant qualities. That being said, women could still own and inherit property and many endowed religious establishments. In a treatise written in 822, the queen was placed above the treasurer, showing that she had important responsibilities.

Manorialism involved the services of the peasant class. The peasants working on estates gave economic power to the warring class; thus, manorialism and feudalism were closely linked. Peasants had to pay lords through a percentage of their harvests. Peasants had to pay to marry outside of their estate and to inherit property.

Because laborers were valuable, lords often encouraged immigration. In entering a relationship with a feudal lord, free farmers lost their status and became serfs. As time went on many free farmers became serfs.

Great Invasions of the Ninth Century

After the Treaty of Verdun, all three kingdoms were subject to foreign invasions led by Vikings, Magyars, and Muslims.

Vikings were Germanic peoples from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark known for their skills at sea and their fearlessness. Some believed that unrest and civil war in Denmark pushed the warriors abroad while others believe that overpopulation and bad crops were the cause. Whatever the reason, Vikings were savage and brought short-term property damage to the places they came upon. They were also known for holding the wealthy for ransom in order to make more money.

The Vikings exploited conflicts among the Carolingians, and Carolingian leaders were also able to manipulate Vikings. Frequent Viking war bonds could have economic consequences, stimulating the following:

- ❖ production of food and wine
- ❖ manufacture and sale of weapons
- ❖ horse breeding

Vikings controlled a vast amount of northern territory and travelled far. Those who settled down and adopted Frankish ways of life helped increase assimilation between the two cultures.

Around 890 Magyar (“Hungarian”) tribes began to move westward. The Magyars were not colonizers and their prime focus was to plunder and become wealthy. Both the Magyars and Vikings depended on fear and found the slave trade to be important- the Vikings especially benefitted from this.

The Muslims also invaded from the south, reaching areas such as Italy and Spain. While early raids had hoped to colonize new lands, later raids of the ninth and tenth centuries took place in an effort to plunder and gain wealth. Out of the three invaders, the attacks made by the Muslims were the least destructive.

The Vikings spread their knowledge of shipbuilding and seamanship to the places they visited. The northeastern and central parts of England became known as Danelaw because of the Danish laws and customs commonly practiced in these areas. Viking trade centers further helped add to the culture of these lands.

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At one time, Slavs lived as a single people in central Europe. After mass migrations occurred, they split into:

- ❖ West Slavs
 - Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Wends
- ❖ South Slavs
 - Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Bosnians
- ❖ Eastern Slavs
 - Ukrainians, Russians, and White Russians (Belarusians)

In the ninth century Vikings appeared in the lands of the eastern Slavs and were interested in international trade. The Vikings were able to connect northern Europe to Constantinople; Vikings attacked nearby Slavic tribes and collected tribute, the most important being slaves.

In order to protect commerce, Vikings declared themselves to be the rulers over the eastern Slavs starting around 860 with the help of Rurik. The Varangian ruler Oleg established his residence at Kiev and ruled over a loose confederation.

The Vikings' assimilation into the population was hastened by their conversion to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The Slavified Vikings left two important legacies:

- ❖ a loose confederation of Slavic territories ruled by one leader
- ❖ a unified religion

Even at its height, the unity of the Kievan principality was quite fragile. Trade was more important than government and there was no easy transfer of power among potential leaders. Great Prince Yaroslav divided the principality among his sons, who in turn did the same; Kiev was turned into many smaller competitive units.

Princes owned farms and estates run by kholops, or slaves. Princes had limited power outside of their estates. Excluding clergy members, two types of people resided in the principalities:

- ❖ noble boyars
 - descendants of Vikings
 - land was private property
 - had freedoms
- ❖ commoner peasants
 - also had freedoms

Summary:

Charlemagne engaged in wars across Europe and successfully created a large empire encompassing a significant portion of the European continent. Counts helped him govern this large territory and these individuals were more involved with locals. Civilization during this time, for the most part, was Christian, feudal, and included Latin elements. Charlemagne's reign saw the Carolingian Renaissance, as education became a more important part of life. The aristocracy eventually managed to gain more control while foreign invaders also contributed to the empire's falling apart and gave way to feudalism. This led to more isolation between communities and trade slowed drastically. The Slavic Kievan principality became a major trading center with eastern peoples and was kept together through a loose confederation and Eastern Orthodox Christianity.