The Early Middle Ages (476-1000)

The Eve of the Frankish Ascendancy

The attempts to save the Roman Empire contributed to its fall

When Diocletian (284-305) sought to deal with threats to the Empire in the east and the west, he divided the empire in half and shared power with Maximium

This established the conditions under which the Empire began to evolve separately

Imperial rule gradually faded away in the West

The East grew increasingly autocratic or absolute rule

Constantine reunited the empire in relocated the capital to Byzantium in 324, and Constantinople flourished as Rome declined

In Italy, Milan assumed Rome’s seat of government, and in 402 that was removed to Ravenna on the Adriatic due to barbarian attacks

By the late 4th century western Rome was in disarray

The Germanic tribes on Rome’s northern frontier had coexisted with Rome for centuries

Trade, and the presence of German domestics, slaves, and soldiers familiarized both sides to one another

Some Germans even rose to command in Roman legions

However, the arrival of the Visigoths (Western Goths) in 376 saw the beginning of barbarian migrations that overwhelmed the West

The Visigoths had been pushed into the empire by pressure from the Huns of Mongolia

The eastern emperor Valens (364-378) allowed the Visigoths to live within the boundaries of the empire under the agreement that they would help defend the eastern frontier

The Visigoths became the first *foederati* or allied alien nation resident within the empire

Roman exploitation of the Visigoths caused them to rebel and they destroyed Valens and his army at Adrianople in 378

Constantinople saved itself by convincing the Visigoths to move west

When the moved west, the western empire then had to remove troops from the western German frontier to deal with the Visigoths in their midst, thereby leaving that frontier open to other Germanic invaders

The western empire was overextended, divided by ambitious military commanders, and weakened by famine, pestilence, and overtaxation

Rome was sacked by the Visigoths led by King Alaric in 410

In 452 Attila led the Huns into Italy

In 455 the Vandals sacked Rome

By the mid 5th century power and control of western Europe passed to barbarian chieftains

Tribalism

In 476 the barbarian leader Odovacer deposed the western Roman leader Romulus Augustulus

In 493, Theodoric, the king of the Ostrogoths took over with the approval of the eastern emperor Zeno

By the turn of the 6th century, the Ostrogoths settled in Italy

The Franks in northern Gaul

The Burgundians in Provence

The Visigoths in southern Gaul and Spain

The Vandals in Africa and the western Mediterranean

The Angles, Saxons, Frisians, and Jutes in Britain

Some Germanic tribes learned and copied some Roman traditions

Aspects of language, law and government were adopted

Other tribes such as the Vandals and Angles and Saxons rejected Roman influence and refused to pay obedience to Constantinople

Christianity was the main bridge between the Romans and the barbarians

The Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Vandals had converted to Christianity even before their entrance into the West

However, they were considered heretics as they tended to follow Arius

Around 500 the Franks converted to catholic Christianity endorsed by the bishop of Rome

The Franks then conquered and converted other Germanic tribes in western Europe

Overall, Germanic tribes eventually became more Romanized than Romans Germanized

Learned and copied behavior

Some elements of the Latin language and Christianity survived into the middle ages

The Byzantine Empire

As the west succumbed to the Germanic tribes the east became a new medieval state

The empire reached its peak during the reign of Justinian (527-565)

Justinian’s domain boasted more than 1,500 cities most with 50,000 or more inhabitants

Constantinople had about 350,000 inhabitants

Justinian’s most influential counselor was his wife Theodora

She was especially helpful in resolving the various doctrinal disputes between various factions of Christians that plagued the empire during Justinian’s time

The Byzantine policy was to centralize government and enforce legal and doctrinal conformity throughout the empire

One of Justinian’s achievements in the area of the law was the codification and publication of Roman law

These legal standards eventually had an important influence on the development of law in Europe after the Renaissance

Religion also was used to centralize the empire

Christianity was proclaimed the official religion of the empire in 380

The great churches in Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem became functions of the state and its welfare programs

Justinian tried but failed to reestablish the old Roman empire and his successors were to focused on the developments in the east to be concerned with the west

The Byzantine empire took a decided turn to the East when the emperor Heraclius spoke only Greek and not Latin and found himself struggling against the Persians and Muslims

After 632 Islamic armies advanced into Byzantine territories in Asia Minor, and in 667 they besieged Constantinople

The emperor Leo established the assumption that secular rulers have the right to legislate religious practices

This doctrine is called Caesaro-papism and was rejected in the West

This development may have been influenced by Islamic iconoclasm

Leo outlawed the use of images in Christian worship

This development exacerbated the division in the church in the east and west

In 1071 the Byzantines were defeated at Manzikert by Muslim Turks and they overran the eastern provinces of the empire

This was the beginning of the long decline of the empire

In 1092 the emperor Alexius Comnenus appealed to the West for help against the Muslim Turks

This appeal was the basis of the Crusades

Three years later the Frist Crusade helped the empire win back some eastern provinces

However, the Fourth Crusade in 1204 saw the crusaders attack and sack Constantinople itself

The Byzantine empire remained a protective barrier for the West against its non-Christian enemies until 1453

It served as a proximate outpost of civilization and the fount of a significant amount of classical learning that filtered into the West during the middle ages

Islam and the Islamic World

A new religion based on the teaching of the prophet Mohammed arose in Arabia in the 6th century

Between 650-651 Mohammed revealed that he had been given texts by God (Qur’an, “reciting”) and called upon people to submit or surrender (Islam, Muslim) to the teachings

The power of his claim was that he was the final and definitive teaching and prophecy of God’s word

Mohammed attacked the pagan shrine at Mecca and was forced to retreat to Medina where he and his followers regrouped and became a stronger missionary and fighting force

In 624 he persuaded Mecca to submit to his authority and he claimed the site as the chief shrine for his new religion

Mohammed stressed practice more than doctrine and it made no rigid distinction between clergy and laity

It had no priesthood, but it looked to a scholarly elite whose authority was derived from their reputation of great piety and learning

Their opinion had the force of law, and they enforced the adherence of the Qur’an by the leaders of the society

Islam unified Arab peoples and other pagan tribes that converted to Islam

Although there was consensus about Mohammed’s teachings, there arose divisions after the death of the prophet leading to divisions in the faith

Doctrinal differences emerged

Factions such as the Kharijites exercised a puritanism who excluded from Islam all but rigorous virtuous Muslims

The leaders of this sect rejected the leadership of the fourth caliph Ali (cousin and son-in-law of Mohammed) and he was assassinated by one of their members

The Shi’a (partisans of Ali) regard Ali and his descendants as the rightful successors to Mohammed

The Sunnis are a majority centrist faction that emphasizes loyalty to the fundamental principles of Islam as opposed to the exclusive issues surrounding succession

Mohammed’s first three successors won control of the southern and eastern rim of the Mediterranean

The Islamic capital was moved to Damascus and by the 8th century the Umayyad caliphs (successor) ruled an empire that stretched from Spain to India

In 750 the Abbasid family overthrew the Umayyads and moved the capital to Baghdad

Shortly thereafter the empire began to break up into different states

Islamic conquests proceeded rapidly to the east and west because their opponents, the Byzantines and the Persians, had been exhausted in a long war

The Arabs struck as the Byzantines drove the Persians out of Egypt, Syria, and Asian Minor thereby leaving a vacuum in those places

The Byzantines had been taxed by their efforts against the Persians

Many of the inhabitants of the Byzantine lands conquered by the Muslims were victims of the Byzantine’s attempts to forcibly impose orthodox Christianity on them

Many saw Islamic invaders as liberators

Islam expanded deep into Christian Europe but were rebuffed in 722 in Spain at Covadonga and in 732 in France at Tours

These developments marked the beginning of the reversal of the Muslim advance into Europe

Even though European Christians opposed the expansion of Islam, the followers of Mohammed had an impact on the development of the West

Europeans learned important technologies, major works of Greek science and philosophy, and other things from the Muslims

The development of the Christian Church

Europe continued to decline as it was overrun by barbarians from the north and east and threatened from the south by Islam

As the Byzantine empire was preoccupied with Islamic expansion and Muslims conquered Mediterranean island and ports, Europe’s communication and contact with the east declined even further

One effect of this growing isolation was the development of distinctive new European societies that drew upon Germanic and Greco-Roman heritages

As western cities and governments declined people sought refuge and work on the self-sufficient estates of landlords

Peasants made up 90% of the population of medieval Europe

Some were free landowners, but many surrendered their lands to influential landowners (kin?) in exchange for assistance

This was the basis of serfdom

Serfs were bound to the land they worked and were not free to move away from it

However, they were protected from being forcibly separated from the land and sold into slavery

What’s going on here?

Recognition of extended kinship?

Hierarchical social relationship based on metaphor or the kinship model?

As trade declined, agricultural districts became insular and self-contained

The estates became the basic political and economic units of medieval society

This was the foundation for the development of the medieval institutions associated with what has been called manorialism and feudalism

This is a caste system

It has to be based on the recognition of kinship relationships at some level

The few medieval urban centers that persisted were bolstered by the church

The church had modeled itself on Rome’s imperial government and located its administrative offices in the cities which had previously been the empire’s center of power

As the western empire disintegrated, the secular imperial magistrates disappeared

Usually the only Roman officials that continued to exist where the bishops who took on the duties of the magistrates

The local cathedral became the center of urban life, and the bishops effectively became the executive authority of the city

Thus, in this way the church preserved some of the procedures of Roman government

The church was forced by Rome’s decline to involve itself in politics

As a result of these developments the church established itself as an effective civilizing and unifying force throughout Europe

The creeds and rituals held in common throughout Europe united people across barriers of ethnicity and traditions

The education, knowledge, and leadership of the clergy was an invaluable resource to the Germanic kings who were trying to maintain order and expand their influence

Early church organization and faith was reinforced by the monasteries that originally developed to the east in Egypt

The monks that found the monasteries were hermits who protested the relaxation of the standards of Christian discipline

They fled to remote areas to practice extreme discipline and restrain in isolated freedom

They became the models of sacrifice on the level of the martyrs of the early church

They were seen to exemplify humanity’s highest calling

Monks (regular), and by extension the secular (parish) clergy, were expected to meet a more demanding standard of restraint and sacrifice than ordinary believers

As a result, the clergy served as models of superior sacrifice which helped elevate the church over secular rulers

The highly regimented communities of monks tried to become “cities of God” isolated from the collapsing Roman empire

In the West the monastic practices were introduced by Athanaius and Martin of Tours in the 4th century

However, it was Benedict of Nursia at Monte Cassino which established the model of western monasticism that became the standard throughout Europe

Benedict’s rules enforced the strict discipline and restraint that was required to create autonomous self-sufficient religious communities

The Benedictine monks were not hermits like those of the east

They were active missionaries and were responsible for converting Germany and England to Christianity

Constantine and the subsequent Roman emperors utilized the church as an office of state

However, as Rome declined, the bishops of the city of Rome eventually acquired a good deal of independence

The doctrine of “papal primacy,” or the bishop of Rome’s proclamation of his right to undisputed and independent leadership of the church developed in 381 when Pope Damasus I objected to the emperor’s claim to primacy

Later in 451, Pope Leo I assumed the title *pontifex maximus* or the “supreme priest” thus asserting his supremacy over all bishops everywhere

At the end of the 5th century Pope Gelasius I declared papal authority to have more weight than that of the state since the church was responsible for ultimate salvation of humanity

Constantinople’s problems with barbarians and Muslims prevented it from doing anything about these claims of church independence in the west

Later when the German Lombard tribes invaded northern Italy in the late 6th and early 7th centuries, Pope Gregory I ignored imperial Roman authorities and negotiated with the barbarians as the representative of the Italian people

Although the patriarch of Constantinople implied a claim of supremacy over Rome, by the time of Gregory separate churches were operating in the east and west

The division was apparent in language, doctrine, disciplinary codes, and liturgies

The Greek church was more mystical, while the Roman church was more practical

The power of the Greek patriarch was limited by the power the emperor had over him

The western church imposed monastic celibacy on all clergy

In the east priests were allowed to marry

The eastern church used leavened bread in the Eucharist

The Roman church used unleavened bread

The Greeks rejected the concept of purgatory, permitted divorce, and performed their liturgy in the language of their parishioners

Distinctive ethnic versions of the Greek church

There were differences in doctrine

The Roman church looked to the pope to define doctrine

The Greek church relied on the authority of the Bible and ecumenical or universal councils

The claim of the pope in Rome to a primacy of authority over the whole church were dismissed in the east

In the 9th century when the dispute over the authority of a universal Christian church came to a head, Pope Nicholas I and Patriarch Photius excommunicated each other

The popes initially looked to the east to defend them from the barbarian invaders

But as help from the east was not forthcoming, and as the western church began to make inroads in converting German barbarians, the church understood that the Franks were the rising power in Europe and were the most promising potential protectors of the faith

In 754 Pope Stephen II persuaded the ruler of the Franks, Pepin III, to defend Rome from the Lombards

This was a watershed development that communicated the arrival of a new era in Europe

The Frankish Kingdom

A warrior named Clovis founded the first Frankish dynasty

It’s called Merovingian after Merovich, an early tribal leader

Clovis and his followers united the Frankish tribes, subdued the Burgundians and Visigoths, and won the support of the Gallo-Romans by converting to orthodox Christianity and turned Roman Gaul into France or “land of the Franks”

The Merovingians struggled over the competing claims of “the one” and “the many”

Competition over authority based on competing claims of inheritance?

As kings (kin is root) worked to centralize their authority (over kinsmen?), powerful magistrates sought to preserve their autonomy

The result was conflict

The Merovingian kings made pacts with the landed nobility and relied on officials called counts to manage their districts of authority

The basis of counties

This is all based on kinship

However, counts were sent to manage districts where they had no hereditary status

Remember that not everyone that you are related to is related to one another

Counts were easier to command that landed aristocrats since the people the counts governed would have no tradition of loyalty to the count’s families

However, counts eventually made hereditary claims to their offices and began to exercise as much independence from royal authority as the landed aristocracy

The unification of the early Frankish state was also impeded by Frankish inheritance customs that divided their estates between all the male heirs

By the 7th century the Merovingian king was in title only

Executive authority resided in the king’s official known as the mayor of the palace

The family of Pepin I of Austrasia monopolized this post until a descendant of Charles Martel, an illegitimate son of Pepin II expropriated the Frankish crown and established the Carolingian dynasty

Charles Martel created a great cavalry by bestowing fiefs or provisional grants on noble aristocrats on the condition that they equip themselves to fight for him

Battle of Tours or Poitiers 732

Much of the land distributed came from the church

The church depended on the Franks for protection and could do little to avoid this confiscation

The church was later partially compensated

The church however played a major role in the Frankish government

The clergy was employed in tandem with counts as royal agents, and Christian missionaries were relied upon to pacify the conquered lands

In 751, Pope Zacharias, helped establish the Carolingian dynasty when he sanctioned Pepin the Short’s bid for the Frankish throne over the Merovingian claimant

In 753, the successive pope, Stephen II asked Pepin the Short to return the favor when he requested help against the Lombards in northern Italy

In 755 the Franks defeated the Lombards and acquired the lands around Rome for the pope thereby confirming the pope’s secular authority over these lands that became known as the Papal States

Around this time a forged document circulated called the Donation of Constantine supported the church in its dealings with the Franks

It stated that Constantine had given the papacy title to the western half of the empire

This implied that the papacy had the right to pass judgement on the legitimacy of western governments

Even though this was a fraudulent document it gave the popes leverage over the Franks

The Franks blurred the boundaries between their state and the church and the church had to fight against being subordinated to the Frankish monarchy

The reign of Charlemagne (768-814)

Charlemagne was the son of Pepin the Short and completed the conquest of their Italian Lombards and assumed their crown

From there he expanded his kingdom by subduing the Saxons from northwestern Germany and resettling them in central Germany

He forced the Muslims out of France across the Pyrenees and into Spain

He annihilated the Avars, a tribe related to the Huns, and brought the Danube plains into the Frankish orbit

By the time of Charlemagne’s death, he consolidated France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, western Germany, Italy, Spain, and Corsica under his reign

Charlemagne took on the characteristics of an emperor

He sought an imperial title

And he established an imperial palace at Aachen or Aix-la-Chapelle

And he sought recognition from the church

Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor on Christmas in 800

This ceremony created a link between the German kings and Roman Italy

The pope agreed to this arrangement with the hope of gaining leverage of the powerful German king

This also set a precedent for later kings being crowned by the church

It also forced the eastern emperors to acknowledge the emperor’s title

Charlemagne relied as many as 250 counts to govern his empire

A local count maintained an army, collected tribute and dues, and administered justice in the name of the king

Justice was administered by the counts in a court called a mallus

This system helped settle grievances that might have cause bloody vendettas

Social behavior

Charlemagne never established a central bureaucracy to govern his kingdom

The counts were basically loyal despots in their districts

However, when Charlemagne sought to exercise some oversight of the counts, he created provincial governors to keep watch over the counts

These governors had the rank and title of prefect, duke, or margrave

Charlemagne sought to improve the governance of his empire by creating a school that would train aristocratic boys in the liberal arts with an emphasis on grammar, logic, rhetoric, and math

The curriculum was designed to educate bureaucrats, but it also had the effect of improving the accuracy of Latin used in official documents and helped produce a standardized form of handwriting making reading much easier

A rebirth of interest in antiquity also emerged as a result of the school

Scholars collected and copied ancient manuscripts

Early church writings including the text of the Bible were also worked on

This helped establish uniformity in church law and liturgy, educate the clergy, and established standards for personal and professional standards of the priesthood

The Carolingian Manor

The chief economic institution was the communal farm called the manor

Medieval farms clustered in villages for protection and assistance

Each family had its own land and lived on what they produced

The conventional view is that the status of the peasants was determined by the nature of their holdings

However, what would determine who got what property?

I think it was determined by kinship

A freeman had property free from the claims of an overlord

He could surrender the lands to an overlord, but then the relationship changed to s subservient one

He had use of the property and could not be separated from it

The main duty of such a peasant was to work the fields that supported the lord and his family

Peasants with little to no property were unfree serfs and had to work more time on the lord’s fields

Serfs with no property were subject to whatever excessive demands of the overlord

The lower clergy that served in the churches on manorial lands were recruited from the ranks of the serfs and many of them continued to work in the fields of their overlords

For most people religion was a matter of practice rather than doctrine

Mass attendance, sacraments, the recitation of prayers and creeds were the practices people engaged in

One of the important technological developments that helped the Carolingians to expand into northern Europe was a new plow that was able to turn the dense soil of the region

Farmers practiced a system of rotating three fields

One raised wheat or rye and was harvested in early summer

Another was planted in oats, barley, lentil, and legumes and were harvested in late summer

The third field was left fallow

As Charlemagne aged his empire became increasingly ungovernable

Local populations obeyed local leaders rather than the imperial leadership

As Charlemagne appointed powerful leaders to keep the empire under his control, their power diminished his

Before his death Charlemagne shared power with his only son Louis the Pious in an effort to consolidate the empire and to thwart growing regional and tribal loyalties

Louis had 3 sons with his first wife and according to tradition each son was entitled to a share of his kingdom

He tried to break from tradition and make his eldest son, Lothar, the sole inheritor of the throne

However, Louis second wife had given birth to a fourth son, Charles the Bald

In an effort to secure the throne for her son, she encouraged her stepsons Pepin and Louis the German (Louis’ second and third sons) to rebel against Louis

Supported by the pope they defeated their father in 833

After Pepin died in 838 and Louis died in 840 the Carolingian was divided between the three surviving sons in the Treaty of Verdun

Lotharingia, Charles the Bald’s kingdom, and Louis the German’s kingdom

When Lothar died in 855 his kingdom was divided up between his three sons

The other two kingdoms competed for portions of Lothar’s kingdom

The collapse of Carolingian power in Italy encouraged the popes to acquire those lands

Ultimately the collapse of Carolingian power created a vacuum which ushered in a renewed decline of civilization and a renewed wave of barbarian attacks

Successive waves of Vikings, Magyars, and Muslims took advantage of this vacuum

The Vikings were the most serious threat

They raided all of Europe’s coasts and reached far inland along the navigable rivers

They were very mobile and fierce and there was little to do to defend against them

The Franks built fortified towns and castles to serve as refuges against attack

Sometimes they bought off the invaders with gold and silver or grants of land

In France, a duchy of Normandy was created for the North-Men

The central government could do very little to protect the people from this threat

Thus, they relied on local strong leaders for protection

Feudal society

The absence of central authority encouraged the development of feudalism

Feudalism was held together by traditional oaths which promised to provide subordinates with protection and maintenance in exchange for a pledge of service

Those who were equipped as soldiers became vassals and formed a professional military caste with a code of knightly conduct

Knight = servant

Networks of relationships within this caste created regional military organizations

Leaders of these organizations assumed responsibility for governing those who lived under their protection

The roots of feudalism are traced to the inability of freemen to fend for themselves

They had to seek alliances with powerful neighbors and were established in a subordinate relationship of the vassi or vassals meaning “those who serve”

Lords of estates accepted as many vassi as they could in order to form private armies

The only way to pay them was to grant them fiefs and give them authority and responsibility over those who lived on the lands

Vassals swore loyalty to their lord and worked for his lord’s interest

The primary obligation was military

Vassals were also expected to attend the lord’s court and to provide financial assistance in times of need

Louis the Pious extended the vassalage beyond the nobility to higher clergy by requiring the bishops and abbots to swear their loyalty to him

This was offensive to the church as it implied church subservience to the state

In the late 10th and 11th centuries reform minded clergy rebelled against vassalage, but they didn’t give up the lands that were rewarded to them for their service

A feudal lord was obliged to protect the vassals from harm, to be their advocate in court, and to provide a fief (a small villa or a mansi, 25 to 48 acres of land)

Royal vassals received 30-200 mansi

The vassalage helped the king garner support among the nobility

However, the granting of fiefs undermined royal power as vassals could create vassals of their own

Since vassals could accept fiefs from more than one lord, all kinds of conflicts developed

There was the creation of the liege lord, or master lord, to whom a vassal owed primary duty in order to clarify the issue of divided loyalties

This only had a limited effect

Kings were weakened by granting lands that became the property of their vassals

The land title remained with the lord who granted it but the lords could not prevent the vassals from passing the lands to their heirs

In the 9th century hereditary possession was legally recognized for ownership

This allowed the nobility to appropriate much of the royal claim to lands and power

Power is the ability to influence

Feudalism created a vulnerability to abuse and confusion, but it created a social stability and ultimately helped restore political centralization in the high middle ages

Ultimately the foundation of modern nation-states were beginning to be established as kings compromised with vassals and arranged feudal contracts to construct forms of central government