Chapter 17

The Foundations of Christian Society in Western Europe
The Germanic Successor States, c. 500 CE

- Last Roman emperor deposed by Germanic Odoacer, 476 CE
- Administrative apparatus still in place, but cities lose population
- Germanic successor states:
  - Spain: Visigoths
  - Italy: Ostrogoths
  - Gaul: Burgundians, Franks
  - Britian: Angles, Saxons
Successor states to the Roman Empire c. 500
The Franks

- Heavy influence on European development
- Strong agricultural base
- Shifts center of economic gravity to Europe
- Firm alliance with western Christian church
Clovis (ruled 481-511)

- Major Frankish leader
- Destroyed last vestiges of Roman rule in Gaul
- Dominated other Germanic peoples
- Franks establish themselves as preeminent Germanic people
Clovis’ Conversion to Christianity

- Paganism, Arian Christianity popular among Franks
- Clovis and army chooses Roman Catholicism
- Influence of wife Clotilda
- Political implications:
  - Alliance with western church
The Carolingians

- Charles “The Hammer” Martel begins Carolingian dynasty
- Defeats Spanish Muslims at Battle of Tours (732)
  - Halts Islamic advance into western Europe
The Carolingian Empire
Charlemagne (r. 768-814)

- Grandson of Charles Martel
- Centralized imperial rule
- Functional illiterate, but sponsored extensive scholarship
- Major military achievements
Charlemagne’s Administration

- Capital at Aachen, Germany
- Yet constant travel throughout empire
- Imperial officials: *missi dominici* ("envoys of the lord ruler")
  - Continued yearly circuit travel
Charlemagne as Emperor

- Hesitated to challenge Byzantines by taking title “emperor”
  - Yet ruled in fact
- Pope Leo III crowns him as emperor in 800
  - Planned in advance?
  - Challenge to Byzantium
Louis the Pious (r. 814-840)

- Son of Charlemagne
- Lost control of courts, local authorities
- Civil war erupts between three sons
- Empire divided in 843
Invasions

- **South: Muslims**
- **East: Magyars**
- **North: Vikings**
  - Norse expansion begins c. 800 CE
  - Driven by population pressure, hostility to spread of Christianity
  - Superior seafaring technology
  - Sailed to eastern Canada, northeastern US
The dissolution of the Carolingian Empire (843 CE) and the invasions of early medieval Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries
The Vikings

- From village of Vik, Norway (hence “Viking”)
- Boats with shallow drafts, capable of river travel as well as open seas
- Attacked villages, cities from 9th century
  - Constantinople sacked three times
- Carolingians had no navy, dependent on local defenses
England

- Viking invasions force consolidation of Angles, Saxons and other Germanic peoples under King Alfred (r. 871-899)
- Built navy
- Fortified cities against attack
Germany and France

- King Otto of Saxony (r. 936-973) defeats Magyars, 955
- Proclaimed emperor by Pope in 962
- Establishment of Holy Roman Empire
- France endures heavy Viking settlement
- Loss of local autonomy
Early Medieval Society

- Concept of Feudalism
  - Lords and vassals
  - Increasingly inadequate model for describing complex society

- Ad hoc arrangements in absence of strong central authorities
Organizing in a Decentralized Society

- Local nobles take over administration from weak central government
- Nominal allegiances, esp. to Carolingian kings
- But increasing independence
Lords and Retainers

- Formation of small private armies
- Incentives: land grants, income from mills, cash payments
- Formation of hereditary class of military retainers
- Development of other functions
  - Justice, social welfare
Potential for Instability

- Complex interrelationship of lord-retainer relations
- Rebellion always a possibility
- Nevertheless, viable large states developed (Germany, France, England)
Origins of Serfdom

- Slaves, free peasants in both Roman and Germanic societies
- Heavy intermarriage
- Appeals to lords, special relationships
- Mid-7th century: recognition of serf class
  - Midway between slave and free peasant
Serfs’ Rights and Obligations

- Right to pass on land to heirs
- Obligation to provide labor, payments in kind to lord
- Unable to move from land
- Fees charged for marrying serfs of another lord
Manors

- Large, diverse estates
- Lord provides governance, police, justice services
- Serfs provide labor, income
The Economy of Early Medieval Europe

- Agricultural center moves north from Mediterranean
- 8th century iron-tipped plow introduced in Europe
- Draft animals bred
- Water mill technology
- Agricultural output insufficient to support growth of cities
- Strong Mediterranean trade despite Muslim domination of sea
Norse Merchant Mariners

- Commerce or plunder as convenient
- Link with the Islamic world for trade
Population Growth of Europe, 200-1000 CE
The Formation of Christian Europe

- Clovis’ conversion forms strong alliance with Roman Christianity
- Church supplies Clovis with class of literate information workers:
  - Scribes
  - secretaries
The Franks and the Church

- Protectors of the Papacy
- Charlemagne destroys Lombards, who threatened Pope, Rome
- Spreads Christianity in northern areas
- Support of scholarship, scribal activity
The Spread of Christianity

- Charlemagne fights pagan Saxons (772-804)
  - Saxons later adopt Christianity
- Scandinavia, other pockets of paganism until c. 1000 CE
Pope Gregory I (590-604 CE)

- “Gregory the Great”
- Asserted papal primacy
- Prominent theologian
  - Sacrament of penance
- Major missionary activity, especially in England
Monasticism

- Egyptian origins, 2\textsuperscript{nd}-3\textsuperscript{rd} centuries
- Monastic lifestyle expands 4\textsuperscript{th} century
- Large variety of monastic rules
  - Range from extremely ascetic to very lax
St. Benedict (480-547)

- Established consistent rule for monasteries
  - Poverty
  - Chastity
  - Obedience

St. Scholastica (482-543)
- Sister of St. Benedict
- Adapts Benedictine Rule for convents
Monasticism and Society

- Accumulation of large landholdings, serfs
- Social welfare projects
  - Esp. labor contributions
- Expansion of literacy
- Inns, orphanages, hospitals