

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



The Byzantine Empire and Emerging Europe, A.D. 50–800

Lesson 4 The Age of Charlemagne

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How can religion impact a culture? What factors lead to the rise and fall of empires?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

exclude to bar from inclusion or participation in
ensure to make sure

Content Vocabulary

wergild “money for a man”; the value of a person in money, depending on social status; in Germanic society, a fine paid by a wrongdoer to the family of the person he or she had injured or killed
ordeal a means of determining guilt in Germanic law, based on the idea of divine intervention: if the accused person was unharmed after a physical trial, he or she was presumed innocent
coronation the ceremony or act of crowning a monarch or ruler

TAKING NOTES: *Determining Importance*

ACTIVITY As you read, use a table like the one below to identify the contributions of the rulers discussed in the lesson.

Clovis	Charlemagne

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

The logo for 'networks' features the word in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, intersecting lines that form a starburst or network pattern.

The Rise of Civilization, Prehistory–c. 2300 B.C.

Lesson 4 The Age of Charlemagne, *continued*

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Christianity was becoming the most important religion in Europe during the Early Middle Ages. At the same time, Germanic tribes became the most important political force. In the end, a new empire arose under Charlemagne. It was linked to the idea of a lasting Roman Empire.

The New Germanic Kingdoms

Guiding Questions *How did the Germanic kingdoms influence the transformation of the Roman world? What was the significance of Clovis’s conversion to Christianity?*

The Germanic peoples had begun to move into the lands of the Roman Empire by the third century. First, the Germanic Visigoths moved into and took over Spain and Italy. Then the Ostrogoths, another Germanic tribe, took control of Italy in the fifth century. The Western Roman Empire had been replaced by a number of states ruled by German kings by 500. The merging, or joining together, of Germans and Romans occurred in different ways in these Germanic kingdoms.

Both the kingdom of the Ostrogoths in Italy and the kingdom of the Visigoths in Spain kept the Roman structure of government. A group of Germanic warriors came to control the much larger native populations. Eventually Romans were **excluded**, or kept, from holding power.

Roman influence was even weaker in Britain. The Roman armies abandoned Britain at the beginning of the fifth century. The Angles and Saxons, which were Germanic tribes from Denmark and northern Germany, then moved in and settled there. Eventually, these peoples became known as the Anglo-Saxons.

The Kingdom of the Franks

The kingdom of the Franks was the only German state on the European continent that lasted a long time. The Frankish kingdom was established by Clovis. He was a strong military leader. Around 500 he became the first Germanic ruler to convert to Christianity. At first, Clovis refused the pleas, or requests, of his Christian wife to adopt Christianity as his religion. According to Gregory of Tours, a sixth-century historian, Clovis had said to his wife, “Your God can do nothing.”

During a battle with another Germanic tribe, Clovis’s army was in trouble, and it was going to lose the battle. Clovis was reported to have cried out a prayer to Jesus. He promised that he would convert to Christianity if his army won the battle. After he prayed, the enemy began to flee. Clovis soon became a Christian.

Clovis’s conversion to Christianity won him the support of the Roman Catholic Church, as the Christian church in Rome was now known. Not surprisingly, the Catholic Church was eager to gain the friendship of a major ruler in the Germanic states.

By 510, Clovis had set up a powerful new Frankish kingdom. His kingdom extended from the Pyrenees in the southwest to German lands in the east—that is, from modern-day France to western Germany. He defeated many Germanic tribes surrounding him and unified the Franks as a people. After Clovis’s death, his sons followed Frankish custom, and they divided his newly created kingdom among themselves. The once-united Frankish kingdom was now divided into three major areas.

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

networks

The Rise of Civilization, Prehistory–c. 2300 B.C.

Lesson 4 The Age of Charlemagne, *continued*

Germanic Society

Over time, Germans and Romans intermarried and began to create a new society. Some of the Germanic social customs played an important role in the new society. The most important social bond, or connection, among Germanic people was the family, especially the extended family of husbands, wives, children, brothers, sisters, cousins, and grandparents.

In the German family structure, men were in control of the family and made all the important decisions. A woman obeyed her father until she married. Then she fell under the legal control of her husband. The extended family farmed their land together and passed it down to future generations. The family also provided protection, which was much needed in the violent atmosphere of the time.

The German concept, or idea, of family affected the way Germanic law treated crime and punishment. In the Roman system, as in the legal system of the United States, a crime such as murder was considered an offense against society or the state. In that system, a court would hear evidence and arrive at a decision. Germanic law, on the other hand, was personal. An injury by one person against another could mean a blood feud, or a violent fight between families. The feud could lead to cruel acts of revenge.

To avoid bloodshed, a new system developed. The system was based on a fine called wergild (WUHR-gihld). **Wergild** was the amount paid by a wrongdoer to the family of the person he or she had injured or killed. Wergild, which means “money for a man,” was the value of a person in money. The value varied according to a person’s social status. An offense against a member of the nobility cost a much more than an offense against an ordinary person or a slave. Germanic laws were established by custom, or existing ways of doing this things. They were not based simply on what a king decided, but they were not codified, or organized into an established set of laws, like Roman law.

Germanic law also used the **ordeal** to determine guilt. The ordeal was based on the idea of divine intervention—God acting in human lives. All ordeals included a physical trial, such as holding a red-hot iron. It was believed that divine forces would not allow an innocent person to be harmed. If the person was not harmed during a physical trial, or ordeal, he or she was thought to be innocent.



Reading Progress Check

Contrasting What is a difference between the Roman and Germanic systems of justice?

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

**networks**

The Rise of Civilization, Prehistory–c. 2300 B.C.

Lesson 4 The Age of Charlemagne, *continued*

The Carolingian Empire

Guiding Question *What impact did Charlemagne have on the Frankish kingdom?*

During the 600s and 700s, the Frankish kings had slowly lost their power to the mayors of the palace. The mayors were chief officers of the king's household. Pepin was one of the mayors, and he finally took the step of taking the kingship for himself and his family. Pepin was the son of Charles Martel, the leader who defeated the Muslims at the Battle of Tours in 732. When Pepin died in 768, his son Charles became the new Frankish king.

This new ruler is known to history as Charles the Great, or Charlemagne. He was a determined and decisive man who was extremely intelligent and curious. Charlemagne was a fierce warrior, a strong statesman, and a pious, or very religious, Christian. It is possible that he could not read or write, but he was a wise patron, or supporter, of learning.

Charlemagne's long rule lasted from 768 to 814. During his reign, he greatly expanded the Frankish kingdom. He created what came to be known as the Carolingian (KAR·uh·lin·jee·uhn) Empire. At its height, this empire covered much of western and central Europe. An empire this size would not be seen again in Europe until Napoleon Bonaparte's rule in the 1800s.

The administration of the empire depended both on Charlemagne's household staff and on counts (German nobles). The counts acted as the king's chief local representatives. In order to limit the counts' powers, Charlemagne set up the *missi dominici* (messengers of the lord king). The *missi dominici* were two men sent out to local districts to **ensure** that the counts carried out the king's wishes and orders.

Charlemagne as Roman Emperor

As Charlemagne's power grew, so too did his prestige as the most powerful Christian ruler. One monk described Charlemagne's empire as the "kingdom of Europe." In 800 Charlemagne acquired a new title—emperor of the Romans. Charlemagne's coronation as Roman emperor took place over 300 years after the Western Roman Empire's collapse. This showed the strength of the idea of an enduring Roman Empire.

The coronation also represented the joining of Roman, Christian, and Germanic elements. A Germanic king had been crowned emperor of the Romans. The pope, the spiritual leader of Western Christendom (Christianity), had crowned the Germanic king. Charlemagne had created an empire that stretched from the North Sea in the north to Italy in the south. It stretched from France in western Europe to Vienna in central Europe. This empire was very different from the empire of Rome which had covered most of the Mediterranean world. A new civilization had emerged. As one author has argued, Charlemagne could be seen as the "father of Europe."

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

The logo for 'networks' features the word 'networks' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, intersecting lines that form a starburst or network-like pattern.

The Rise of Civilization, Prehistory–c. 2300 B.C.

Lesson 4 The Age of Charlemagne, *continued*

Carolingian Renaissance

Charlemagne had a strong desire to promote, or encourage, learning in his kingdom. This desire stemmed from his own intellectual curiosity and from the need to educate Catholic clergy and government officials. His efforts led to an intellectual revival sometimes called the Carolingian Renaissance, or rebirth. This revival involved renewed interest in Latin culture and classical works—the works of the Greeks and Romans.

Many of the monasteries in the Carolingian Empire had been founded by Irish and English missionaries. These monasteries played a central role in this cultural revival. Monks in the writing rooms copied the Bible and the works of classical Latin authors. Their work was an important factor in preserving the legacy of the Greeks and Romans. About eight thousand manuscripts survive from Carolingian times.



Reading Progress Check

Explaining What was the importance of the *missi dominici*?
