

Early Middle Ages - The Franks



In the absence of the Romans, Western Europe was taken over by a variety of Germanic and Celtic peoples. Each group established its own laws and customs and some of them grew to a size that required complex organization and structure and would leave its mark on history. The Franks were one of these groups.

Fiercely independent and often warlike, the Franks were a unique group of people who wore long hair in the belief that a person's strength was measured by its length. The Franks also liked to decorate themselves with jewelry and there are lots of evidence of their fine craftsmanship still around today. The Franks were farmers but were also responsible for invading other territories. They would eventually spread out over

most of Western Europe. At one point the name "Frank" came to mean someone from Western Europe. In fact, these people named themselves as "Frank" which meant "free", because they were fiercely independent and were difficult to rule.

Frank or France? - The Reign of Clovis

The Franks would eventually take control over most of Gaul which is known today as France. This only happened when one Frank named Clovis became strong enough to tame and unite the independently minded Franks. Clovis came from the royal Merovingian family and he reigned from 481 to 511 C.E.. His capital was Paris and with the united Franks fighting for him, he was able to control most of what is now Western Europe. Clovis is also famous for converting his kingdom to Christianity. The Franks, like the Celts were a **pagan** group of people. The word pagan is used to describe people who do not believe in any of the three **monotheistic** religions. Pagans would worship "...the old gods" with an heavy emphasis on gods who represented the mysteries of nature. When Clovis converted to Christianity, he spread his new faith throughout his Kingdom and as a result is held in high regard with Christians.

Clovis would institute his own laws based upon old Roman laws which he called the **Salic Code**. When Clovis died at the ripe old age of 45, he left a united kingdom to his four sons who would only fight amongst themselves for total control. The great kingdom that Clovis work so hard to build, would eventually be weakened and fall into chaos over the next two hundred years as his Merovingian descendents fought and murdered one another.

Charlemagne

As the Merovingian's became weaker and weaker due to their constant in-fighting, a new Frankish ruler would come to power. A man named Pepin the Short would replace the Merovingian royal

Pagan - People who do not believe in any monotheistic religion, but instead revere the "...the old gods" with an emphasis on god who represent the mysteries of nature.

Monotheistic - Belief in a single, all-powerful God rather than a belief in many or multiple Gods (polytheism).

Salic Code - The established rule of laws established by the Frankish King Clovis.

family with his own Carolingian family and his son Charlemagne would become one of history's greatest rulers.

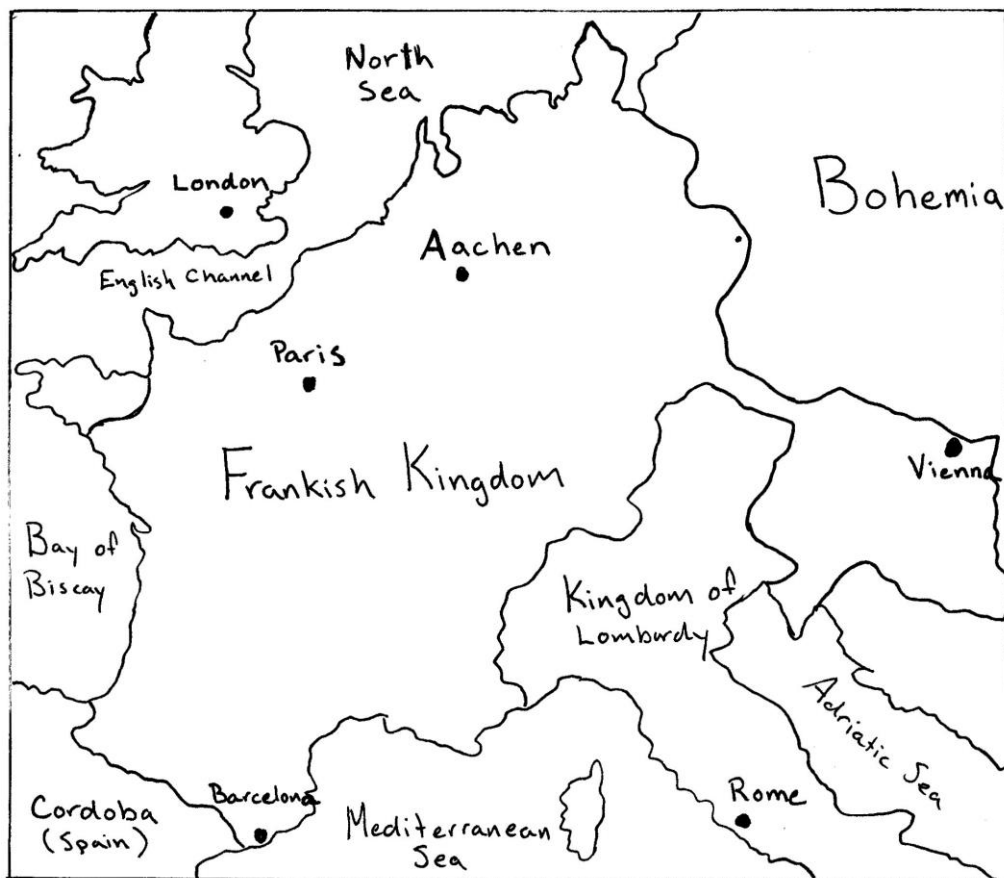
Charlemagne switched the capital of the Franks from Paris to Aachen, Germany. From his new capital, Charlemagne would bring about new reforms to the Salic code, would establish new schools and took a keen interest in reviving the art and design of buildings, or **architecture**, which the Romans had excelled at. Many of the great Roman buildings were still around and being used and it is easy to see how Charlemagne was inspired by their great works. Charlemagne is described as being a thoughtful and fair ruler who brought about peace in his empire during his life. Although admired, Charlemagne could also be cruel and merciless if opposed. Once he ordered the killing of over 4000 Saxon soldiers that he captured when they refused to convert to Christianity, but despite such cruelty he is best known for his love of education, particularly science and literature.

History Repeats Itself

Like the Merovingian's before him, when Charlemagne dies, his Kingdom would fall apart due to the in-fighting that occurred between his **descendants**. History is full of examples of great leaders who die leaving their world in a better place only for it to be slowly destroyed by the greed, envy or sheer incompetence of their descendants or rulers who follow. One of the reasons why we study the history of humans and civilizations so closely is so that we can learn from the mistakes of others. The more we understand of the mistakes of the past, the better able we are to recognize similar errors in the present and the future. The trick is (and always will be) in trying to recall errors and misjudgments that occurred in different times and different circumstances but can still be applied to modern times.

Architecture - The science, art and design of building, most often referred to large public buildings.

Descendants - Sons and daughters that follow a person.



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Directions: READ the handout entitled: "Early Middle Ages - The Franks" and then READ pages 21-26 in your text Pathways - Civilizations Through Time. Once completed then answer the following questions:

1. Use your handout to provide definitions for the following terms on a separate piece of paper; (1 mark each)

pagan Salic Code descendants social class betrothal

2. On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions using **COMPLETE SENTENCES**:

- a. In your own words, describe who the Franks were and what area of Europe they were eventually to take over. (2 marks for quality of response & inclusion of details)
- b. In your own words, describe who Clovis was and describe what happened to his kingdom after he died? (2 marks for the quality of response & evidence of thought and effort)
- c. In your own words, describe what made Charlemagne a great ruler. Why do you think it is important to study history? (2 marks for quality of response & evidence of insight)
- d. Under the Salic Code, crimes were punishable by slavery, banishment, torture, death or most often by a fine. Complete the following chart that lists the fines for the following crimes: (5 marks for correct completion)

Salic Crimes and Fines	
touching a woman's hand	
grave robbing	
killing a pregnant woman	
killing a boy under twelve	
killing a girl under twelve	

3. Examine the Bar Graph Exercise on page 24 of your text, Pathways - Civilizations Through Time, and create your own bar graph comparing two categories of your choice. Remember, every bar graph has TWO axes. The horizontal axis shows the categories (the population under twelve) and the vertical axis shows the values that you measure those categories (population %).

You will be marked out of 3 for each set of bar graphs,
for a total of 6 marks.

Total: ___/22

