

## **The Barbarian Invasions: The Migration Period in Europe, 300-700 CE – Outline**

### **I. End of the Roman Empire**

- a. 476 CE
  - i. Traditional date for the end of the Roman Empire
  - ii. “Barbarian” Germanic general Odoacer deposed the last Western Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustus
- b. Who were these barbarians who are charged with ultimately bringing down the Roman Empire?

### **II. Who were the barbarians?**

- a. Barbarians – term applied by the Romans to any group they considered uncivilized
  - i. From a Greek word meaning “anyone who is not Greek”
- b. Barbarians were all of the groups/tribes living in Europe
  - i. Europe was not populated like it is today
  - ii. Different tribes were migrating around the continent
  - iii. For example: “Germanic tribes” describes a lot of different tribes who lived in the general area now called Germany, but they did not think of themselves as “Germans,” and went on to found completely different countries, such as the Germanic Franks founding France
- c. Romans had a long history of conquering the peoples of Europe
- d. Julius Caesar conquered the Gauls of what is now called France
- e. Those European tribes who remained independent of Rome were considered barbaric by the Romans

### **III. European migrations**

- a. First phase of migrations (circa 300-500 CE)
  - i. Germanic peoples of northern Europe who settled throughout Europe (territory and border lands of Roman Empire)
  - ii. Such as the Alamanni, Alans, Angles, Burgundians, Franks, Goths (Ostrogoths and Visigoths), Jutes, Langobards, Lombards, Saxons, Suebi, Vandals
- b. Second phase of migrations (circa 500-700 CE)
  - i. Slavic tribes of eastern Europe
  - ii. Such as the Bulgars
- c. Division into phases not very important
  - i. These tribes took centuries to eventually settle
  - ii. By the time they settled, a new migratory wave—the Viking invasions—took place starting in the 700s
- d. Example – Goths originated in Scandinavia
  - i. By 150 CE, the Goths were living on the shores of the Baltic Sea
  - ii. By 200 CE, the Goths were in southeastern Europe along the Black Sea
  - iii. Here, the Goths split, with those living in the east called Ostrogoths, and those in the west called Visigoths

#### IV. Germanic culture

- a. Economy
  - i. Hunters and farmers
- b. War culture
  - i. Tribes always fighting one another
- c. Religion
  - i. Valhalla – warriors' heaven
  - ii. Animal and human sacrifice
  - iii. Germanic pagan gods survive in our days of the week
    - 1. Tiu = Tuesday
    - 2. Woden = Wednesday
    - 3. Thor = Thursday
    - 4. Frig = Friday
    - 5. FYI: Saturday is named after the Roman god Saturn, Sunday is named after the sun, and Monday is named after the moon
  - iv. Gradually converted to Christianity through exposure to the Roman Empire and Christian missionaries

#### V. Germanic justice

- a. Trial by ordeal
  - i. Innocence proven by survival of a trial
  - ii. For example, retrieving an object from boiling water or walking over hot coals
  - iii. If the person survived the ordeal, or healed quickly, the verdict was innocent
  - iv. Modern version – Salem Witchcraft Trials
- b. Trial by combat
  - i. Winner of the fight is innocent of the crime, or winner of the dispute
  - ii. Modern era version – dueling
- c. These trials survived through the Middle Ages in Europe

#### VI. Angles, Saxons, and Jutes

- a. 400s CE
- b. Moved into Britannia as the Roman Empire declined
- c. Gave the area its name
  - i. England = "Angle's land"
- d. Old English language
  - i. Most closely related to Frisian, a German dialect
- e. *Beowulf*

#### VII. The Burgundians

- a. Late 400s to 530s
- b. Founded a kingdom in southern Gaul (modern France) in the Valley of the Rhone

#### VIII. The Vandals

- a. Led by Genseric (lived circa 389 CE-477 CE)
  - i. Crossed Gaul, to Spain, to north Africa
  - ii. Established Vandal kingdom around Carthage and on islands such as Corsica and Sardinia
- b. Famously sacked Rome in 455 CE
  - i. After murder of Emperor Valentinian III
  - ii. Plundered city's riches – origin of term *vandalism*

iii. Kidnapped emperor's widow, Licinia Eudoxia, and daughters, Eudocia and Placidia

1. Eudocia was married off to Huneric, the son of Genserich

c. Finally conquered by the Eastern Roman Empire in 533 CE

## IX. The Franks

a. Kingdom in Gaul

i. Became known as "France" after the Franks

b. United under King Clovis (lived circa 466-511 CE)

i. First king of France (ruled 481-511 CE)

ii. Married Christian Burgundian princess, Clotilde

iii. Converted to Christianity

## X. Review questions

a. What is the traditional date for the end of the Roman Empire?

b. Who were the barbarians?

c. Describe elements of ancient Germanic culture that are still with us.

d. How did England get its name?

e. Explain the origin of the term *vandalism*.

f. How did France get its name?

## XI. The Lombards

a. Invaded Italy following the death of Emperor Justinian (Eastern Roman Empire) in 565 CE

b. 568 CE

i. Under leadership of Alboin

ii. Set up a powerful kingdom in the Italian peninsula

1. Modern Italian region of Lombardy

2. Conquered by France's King Charlemagne in 774 CE

## XII. The Huns

a. From Asia, east of the Volga River

i. Their migration pushed the Goths into the Roman Empire, circa 370 CE

b. Led by Attila the Hun (lived 406-453 CE)

c. Campaign in Gaul

i. Sacked various cities

ii. Finally defeated by alliance of Romans and Visigoths under General Aetius at the Battle of Chalons (451 CE)

d. 450 CE – Emperor Valentinian III's sister, Honoria, sent him an engagement ring (to avoid a forced marriage)

i. Attila used this pretext to attempt an invasion of Rome (452 CE)

ii. According to legend, Pope Leo I, helped by St. Peter and St. Paul, convinced Attila at the Po River to halt his advance

iii. Attila retreated and died a year later, allegedly by choking to death on his own blood (from a nosebleed) while in a drunken stupor following his wedding to Ildico

## XIII. The Goths

a. Split into Visigoths (West Goths) and Ostrogoths (East Goths) around the year 200 CE

b. The Visigoths (West Goths)

i. Led by Alaric I (lived circa 370-410 CE)

ii. Pushed into the Roman Empire by the westward migration of the Huns

1. 378 CE – Romans defeated by the Visigoths at the Battle of Adrianople

- iii. Sacked Rome in 410 CE
- iv. Eventually settled in Spain
  - 1. Visigothic kingdom in Spain lasted until Arab Muslim invaders arrived in 711 CE
    - a. These Muslim rulers were not expelled until completion of the Reconquista under Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492
- c. The Ostrogoths (East Goths)
  - i. Led by Theodoric the Great (lived 454-526 CE)
    - 1. Raised at the court in Constantinople as a traditional hostage, returning to the Ostrogoths at age 31
  - ii. Kingdom in Italy
    - 1. Capital city – Ravenna
      - a. Center of art and learning
    - 2. Conquered by Emperor Justinian (Eastern Roman Empire) in 554 CE

#### **XIV. Odoacer and the fall of Rome**

- a. 476 CE – the barbarian general, Odoacer, dethroned the last Western Roman emperor, Romulus Augustus
  - i. No one even knows for certain which tribe he belonged to, only that he was Germanic
  - ii. The conquest of the Western Roman Empire was a long process, and a lot of factors contributed to Rome's decline
- b. This date (476 CE) is traditionally used for the end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages, circa 500-1400 (or Dark Ages, circa 500-800)

#### **XV. The Dark Ages (500-800 CE)**

- a. Universal rule under Rome collapsed
  - i. Separate barbarian kingdoms ruled in Rome's place
- b. Economic decline
  - i. Trade
    - 1. Infrastructure fell apart (roads and bridges)
    - 2. Piracy in the seas hurt trade
    - 3. Few coins minted
  - ii. Industry
    - 1. With limited trade, little demand for goods
    - 2. Fewer skilled workers trained
    - 3. Depopulation of cities (workers returned to farms)
- c. Culture and learning
  - i. Illiteracy grew
  - ii. Ancient wisdom of Greece and Rome largely lost
    - 1. Preserved by Christian monks (Europe) and Muslim Arabs (Middle East and northern Africa)

#### **XVI. Review questions**

- a. Describe the conquests of Attila the Hun.
- b. At what battle, fought in 378 CE, did the Visigoths defeat the Romans?
- c. Where did the Visigoths eventually settle and establish a kingdom?
- d. Who made Ravenna an important cultural center?
- e. How was Europe governed following the fall of Rome?
- f. Explain why the period of 500-800 CE is commonly referred to as the Dark Ages.