The Carolingian World: Europe in the Early Middle Ages

I. The Frankish Kingdom and the Emergence of the Carolingians
    A. Merovingian Politics
        1. Clovis divided his kingdom into four parts.
        2. Lack of clear rules for succession meant numerous civil wars in Merovingian Gaul.
        3. Queens exercised power because marriages made diplomatic alliances, because they often controlled the royal treasury, and because they served as guardians of princes who hadn't reached legal adulthood.
        4. Who were the Merovingian administrators?
            a. Comites, or counts ruled cities and collected taxes.
            b. The dux (duke) controlled military forces in a specific region.
            c. Scribes at the court kept records, while legal officials and treasury agents gave advice to the king.
            d. The mayor of the palace was the most important secular official.
            e. The king relied on the counts and bishops for information from throughout the kingdom.
        5. The development of taxes.
            a. Kings depended on revenue from royal estates.
            b. When kings were traveling, local officials had to support them.
            c. Another source of revenue was conquest of new lands.
            d. The land tax declined as more and more people became tax-exempt.
    B. Emergence of the Carolingians
        1. Members of the Carolingian family acquired power gradually as mayors of the palace and dukes. Marriage alliances and military successes also helped.

2. In the period 754–756, Pope Stephen II supported the Carolingian Pippin's claim to be Frankish king in exchange for support against Arabs and Avars and against his enemies within Rome.
3. In 800 Pope Leo III crowned Pippin's son Charlemagne Roman Emperor.

II. The Empire of Charlemagne
  A. Charlemagne (r. 768–814) was crude and brutal, but extremely intelligent.
  B. Charlemagne continued the campaigns of conquest of earlier Carolingians, conquering northern France, northwestern Germany, northern Italy (Lombardy), and Bavaria.
  C. Government of the Carolingian Empire
    1. Charlemagne's empire was not a modern state but a collection of peoples and tribes held together by personal oaths of faith and loyalty.
    2. Carolingian power rested on the Frankish aristocracy.
    3. Charlemagne's advisers created a political ideology, arguing that a ruler held power from God but had to respect the law. This was largely based on Augustine's theories of kingship.

III. The Carolingian Slave Trade
  A. The Carolingian period witnessed moderate population growth and a good deal of inter-regional commerce.
  B. From the tenth century on, Europeans carried on trade with the Muslim world.
  C. Muslim traders were particularly interested in importing European slaves.
  D. Factors/Reasons for Trade
    1. A labor shortage in the Muslim world increased demand for European slaves.
    2. Geographic proximity also helps explain the slave trade.
    3. Racial or ethnic preference might also have been a factor in the trade.
    4. For both Arabs and Europeans, selling war captives was a common practice.
  E. European moralists complained about the sale of Christians to Muslims.

IV. The Carolingian Intellectual Revival
  A. Northumbrian Culture
    1. The center of the Carolingian intellectual revival was the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria, where Roman forms of Christianity mixed with Irish-Celtic forms.
    2. Northumbrian monasteries produced scores of religious books.
    3. In Gaul and Northumbria "double monasteries" developed in which abbesses (women) directed two separate but adjoining establishments, one of monks, the other of nuns.
    4. The Venerable Bede, a Northumbrian monk, produced the earliest history of the English people. He also popularized the practice of dating events from the birth of Christ.
    5. Although Bede spent his life in study, most monks did more active work in the fields or in administering the monasteries.
    6. A Northumbrian monk wrote the English heroic epic Beowulf in the eighth century.
  B. The Carolingian Renaissance

1. Charlemagne patronized the synthesis of a new cultural tradition based on Christian sources and common to Gaul, Italy, the British Isles, and Spain.
2. Charlemagne directed church officials throughout his empire to educate monks and clergy into a better understanding of scripture and Christian writings.
3. At his court in Aachen Charlemagne assembled scholars from all over Europe, including his chief adviser on religious and educational matters, Alcuin (ca 735–804), a Northumbrian monk.
4. Through production of books and education scholars of the Carolingian Renaissance completed the Christianization of Europe.
C. Health and Medical Care in the Early Middle Ages
1. Most medical treatment was by prescription of drugs.
2. Poor diet, eye infections, and infected wounds were common.
3. Many women died in childbirth.
4. Folk medicine was all that was available to most people.
V. Aristocratic Resurgence.
A. Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious (r. 814–840) failed to continue his father's repression of potential enemies in the aristocracy.
B. Louis's three sons divided the empire amongst themselves at the Treaty of Verdun (843) after years of civil war.
C. From 830 aristocratic conspiracies undermined the unity of the Carolingian empire.
VI. Feudalism and the Historians
A. The meaning of the term feudalism, invented in the 1600s, is unclear. The term emphasizes the feud, an estate granted by a superior to his vassal in exchange for service, but the forms of feudalism differed dramatically from one area of Europe to another.
B. Two interpretations of feudalism have influenced the thinking of scholars about medieval history.
1. Marc Bloch, writing in 1940, saw feudalism as an entire social system and way of life.
2. Other scholars explain feudalism in political and legal terms as a system "in which political power was treated as a private possession and was divided among a large number of lords."
3. The authors endorse number (2) above as more useful.
C. The Origins of Feudalism
1. An early theory of the origins of feudalism explains that it arose from the need of Carolingian magnates for bodyguards and soldiers, plus the arrival of the stirrup in Europe from China, plus the expense of horses and armor.
2. A more recent theory argues that warfare on horseback was unimportant in Carolingian times. Instead, a Carolingian king used grants of land and spoils of war to cement his relationships with his retainers.
3. Knights did not have political power; higher-level nobles such as counts did.

4. The breakdown of the Carolingian empire combined with barbarian invasions in the ninth century gave more power to the counts as local rulers who could defend the areas they controlled.
5. Under this form of early feudalism women had extensive rights; they could inherit fiefs and hold land. Some children retained their mothers' last names.

D. Manorialism
1. Between 700 and 800 A.D. many European peasants (perhaps 60 percent) gave up their freedom to become serfs on the manors of local lords. As such, they received protection from the lord, but owed him (or her) a percentage of their annual harvest.

VII. Great Invasions of the Ninth Century
A. Assaults on Western Europe
1. As the Carolingian Empire weakened, outside attacks hastened its collapse.
2. The Vikings or "Normans" (Northmen) came from Scandinavia, traveling by sea and along inland waterways. They raided throughout Europe and established control over Slavic kingdoms, much of the British Isles, today's Normandy, and other areas.
3. From about 890, Magyar tribes ("Hungarians") from Asia crossed the Danube and conquered northern Italy, Bavaria, and Saxony. Even the Rhineland and Burgundy paid them tribute.
4. Muslims also encroached on Europe anew. In the 600s and 700s Muslim invaders had aimed to conquer and colonize. In the 800s and 900s they sought plunder. They attacked Rome and even ports on the French coast of the Atlantic.

B. The Vikings and the Kievan Principality
1. Vikings took control of river trade routes on the east European plain between the Baltic Sea and Byzantium.
2. They also collected tribute from local Slavic tribes.
3. Viking rulers assimilated Slavic culture, adopted the Orthodox Christianity of Byzantium, and created a loose federation of Slavic tribes under a single ruling dynasty, based in Kiev.
4. After 1054 the Kievan federation disintegrated due to civil war between rival claimants to the title of Grand Prince.
5. Peasants in the Slavic territories remained personally free.