Roots of European Civilisation

Barbarians and the Dark Ages

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Fall of the Roman Empire in the West
Barbarian Kingdoms

- After the fall of the Roman Empire various Germanic tribes settled in its former territories:
  - Ostrogoths (Italy) (later they were replaced with Lombards)
  - Visigoths (Spain, Southern France)
  - Franks (North France, Netherlands, part of Germany)
  - Burundians (region of Worms, later Burgundy, Switzerland)
  - Anglo-Saxons (England)
Theodoric the Great King of Italy

- Ruler of Italy 493 – 526 A.D
- Regent (and *de facto* ruler) of Visigoths 511 – 526 (Spain and south of France)
- He practiced Arianism – after Catholic Justin I become Emperor in Constantinople it meant conflict with the Empire
- He was enlightened ruler, he tried to restore glory of Italy – activity of philosopher Beothius and historian Cassiodorus
St. Appolinare in Ravenna
Conflict between Catholicism and Arianism
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- Both Gothic tribes (Visigoths and Ostrogoths) were practicing Arianism.
- Local “Roman” population was basically Catholic.
- Gothic rule was not supported by local population despite its success (until Visigoths turned Catholic).
- Catholic faith helped Franks to seize power from Goths.

Baptism of Clovis c. 1500
Merovingian Dynasty divided France into little kingdoms. Very soon Merovingian Kings started to play only ceremonial role – country was ruled by Mayors. Mayor Peppin the Middle made his position hereditary. His son Charles Martel became the most powerful ruler in Western Europe, though he was not a King. He also won the Battle of Tours saving Europe from Arabs. From Charles Martel the dynasty is called Carolingian. Son of Charles Martel proclaimed himself King of Francs.
Battle of Poitiers (Tours) – 732 r
Charlemagne

- Ruled 768 – 814 A.D.
- Made great conquests
- 25 December 800 A.D crowned Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III
- He cared for art and science (Carolingian Renaissance)
- During his reign term Europe appears as a political unity
Kingdom of Charlemagne
Heritage of Dark Ages

- Dark Ages, though barbaric contributed to European culture mainly by providing mythology.
- Main Epics are (among others):
  - Nibelungslied
  - Song of Roland and other stories about Charlemagne
  - Stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table
Niebelungslied

- Burgundian Epic known as Nibelungenlied and also as Norse Saga.
- It has two parts:
  - First covers adventures of Siegfried, who defeated the dragon as he was wooing Kriemhild (Gudrun) daughter of king of Burgundians, and as he was killed by her brothers and Brunnhild
  - Second part covers the revenge of Kriemhild made with the help of her new husband Attila the Hun
Pieśń o Nibelungach

- Nibelunglied is a basis for Wagner's opera cycle „Ring of Nibelungs”
- Motives from Nibelunglied were often used by German nationalists and Nazis
Song of Roland

- Epic covers the Battle of Roncevaux Pass in Pyrenees of 15 August 778 A.D.
- According to the legend Roland fought against Saracens whereas in reality he battled Basques.
- Roland (Hruodland, lord of Breton March), died in ambush refusing to call for help.
Song of Roland

- Roland was one of the popular icons of medieval poetry.
King Arthur

- King Arthur together with Charlemagne were considered ideal kings in medieval times.
- There is no "Story of King Arthur", but rather set of different, often contradictory legends.
- It is disputable if a real King Arthur ever existed, and if so, who he was.
King Arthur

- Arthurian legends can be divided into three types:
  - Celtic texts where Arthur is defender of Britons and conqueror of Saxons
  - English (Norman) texts, where Arthur is „Ideal King”
  - German and French texts focusing on adventures of the Knights of Round Table
Decline of Ancient Culture

- Culture and science of Antiquity begin to decline much before the fall of political structures.
- The crisis was connected to the crisis of the state.
- Decline of cities in late Antiquity meant decline of schools which were located in these cities.
- In order to provide clergy capable of reading and writing the Church took over education.
- A characteristic feature of Late Antiquity and Early Medieval times is lack of new works, but rather compilation of previous achievements.
Monasteries and Culture

- Late Antiquity monasteries were surviving thanks to money provided by land cultivated by peasants.
- St. Benedict of Nursia (early VI c. A.D.) created new monastic order based on rule: "ora et labora" - "pray and work", creating the basis for future power of monasteries.
- Monasteries were centres of "science" - they hosted largest libraries of Medieval Europe"
Late Merovingian times (especially after the fall of Spain) were marked by deepest crisis of culture.

- Latin was barely known in Europe.
- During Charlemagne times in continental Western Europe only Eriugena could understand Greek.
- Schools and books were extremly rare.
Carolingian Renaissance

- Court of Charlemagne was a centre of Europe's culture rebirth.
- Charlemagne wanted the glory of Roman culture, science and art restored.
- Philosophers and scientists begin to educate Europe again.
- Charlemagne needed educated people to help him to rebuild culture – he found them in Ireland.
„How the Irish Saved Civilisation”

- Ireland adopted Christianity in V c. A.D
- A unique merger of Christian religion and pagan intellectual tradition took place.
- Irish monasteries preserved Roman and Greek heritage for Western Europe
Thank you for attention