



# **Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World**

*Patrick J. Geary*

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From the twilight of the Roman Empire emerged the kingdoms of Merovingian Europe (c. 400-700 AD), which were, in turn, the basis for the nations of medieval and modern Europe. Professor Geary draws on the latest archaeological and historical findings to elucidate one of the least understood periods of European history. This text is aimed at both survey and graduate courses on medieval history, which invariably take the Merovingian period as their starting point.

## **Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World Details**

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# **From Reader Review Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World for online ebook**

**Susan Abernethy says**

Link to my review of this book:

<http://flhwnotesandreviews.com/2016/0...>

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**Heather Domin says**

I'm so glad I saved all my books from college. You never know when one will come in handy.

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**Amanda says**

Used in my Medieval Europe course. Very helpful for studies on the Merovingians.

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**Lauren Albert says**

Geary manages to pack an awful lot into this small book. He does his best to make what is a very confusing period of history clear to non-specialists. But I think confusion is inevitable to some extent. A historian of the period is dealing with geographic groups, tribal groups, family groups, linguistic groups, etc. And people from many of these groups migrate and mix with other groups. Then, the non-specialist is dealing with endless place and regional names that often don't correspond to any place he or she is familiar with. It can be hard to grasp what the European world was like before "countries." Both chaotic and fascinating.

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**Comicfairy (Leanne) says**

The book is a survey based primarily on primary sources of classical and translated works since Geary states that his mission was to address the issue of a huge lack of material available for an English speaking audience.

The main scope of the book is Merovingian Gaul which spanned 481-751, but the first half of the book just covers the Roman Empire beginning at the end of the 5th century. The first Merovingian King Clovis does not get mentioned until Chapter 3 (77). There are extensive bibliographies at the rear of the book summarizing each recommended sources and his endnotes are strictly to show sources (most of which are primarily sources in Latin, German, or French) and there are no notes included with them. Additionally, many foreign words are thrown into the text without explanation and Geary jumped around with timelines and locations so often that I was dizzy.

I was also confused to which audience Geary was addressing. Supposedly he wrote this book because much of the available literature on the subject is not in English, and he wanted to offer a contribution to American students in the field. However, only highly educated scholars would know most of the foreign vocabulary used through the book – and if they are highly educated, they would likely already know the subject matter to begin with and likely would not need a survey. More likely, this is meant to be a strict synthesis aimed at higher education.

While I enjoyed this piece, there simply did not seem to be enough data regarding the Merovingian Dynasty specifically, nor that of its mythos. Perhaps this disappointment is due to my believing I would be reading strictly of the Merovingians when, in fact, most chapters did not discuss this. Professor Geary frequently alludes to the Merovingian “mythic” origins, yet never addresses them. (94+) The Merovingian mythos is a huge part of its allure. Playing on the “mystical powers” of their bloodline allowed the Merovingian Kings to instill awe and fear in their people and added to their renowned charisma. If a non-history major who has heard of the Merovingian dynasty picked up this book, it is likely through the tales told of their connection to the Holy Grail or in modern literature.

There is a helpful family tree although two founders of the dynasty (Chlodio and Merovech) are absent. Only on ONE page (80) do these founders get mentioned! I was surprised to only find 2 maps and neither timelines nor images of relics and the like. If this is to be a survey, one would assume these to be invaluable.

I found it frustrating that the author consistently refers to information provided by Gregory of Tours even while claiming Tours was biased and unreliable. Geary even relied on a quote from Julius Ceasar to claim that the German diet consisted of milk. (46) Attributing any quote to Ceasar is sketchy at best much less one in this context! There are also occasional errors in the data itself.

Patrick Geary is a highly educated man with a rich background in Medieval History and I have a lot of admiration for him, but this piece left me a bit disappointed. Hopefully an updated version will be printed that will alleviate some of these issues. Meanwhile, I consider it a nice addition to my knowledge of the world the Merovingians inhabited, rather than the family itself.

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### **Paul Sdaerdoog says**

Great academical book. Published by Oxford University Press, that should say it all. I like the way it presents the developing of the French and German nations, by the permanent wars and conflicts between various Germanic, Slavic, Indo-European and other types of tribes. Good reading for the brave European nationalists! :P

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### **Jenn says**

One of my biggest problems with the study of European History is the assumption that all culture, thought, and society ended when Romulus Augustulus was removed from the throne of the Western Roman Empire. For centuries writers and historians acted as if the world ceased to exist for about 300-hundred years until Charlemagne resurrected it in 800. Professor Geary attempts to correct much of that thought in this book. A medievalist himself, he ties the culture of the Middle Ages, (think knight in armor, Crusades, and Monty Python), to the world of the ancient with the late Roman Empire. We can see in this book that indeed there is

a clear and concise link between the two, and the slow development of the ancient Roman Empire into the Middle Ages.

Perhaps my biggest praise for the book is that Prof. Geary is clear to point out that the Frankish peoples and other Germanic tribes did not exist in a vacuum. Their eventual domination of areas that once were Roman was not always the swift and violent take-over we associate with say the Vandals, but was in some cases, like the Franks, a slow absorption that led to their eventual dominance in the hole of power left when things in Rome fell apart. It's this important fact that highlights Late Antiquity, that transition between the Classical Roman age to the Medieval, and how the Roman world never really 'fell' as we have all been led to believe by Gibbons and everyone else, but instead morphed and changed, and Geary highlights this by showing how these tribes that for so long had been on the borders of Rome began to change what it once had been.

The book isn't presenting new information by any means, but it is trying to put a new and different spin on it. I will admit, I am biased in the fact that I was one of Professor Geary's students at UCLA, and the book does flow better when read in context with his lectures, (which I might add are VERY enjoyable, he has a dry wit which doesn't always come through in his academic readings). For anyone interested in this time period in history, I highly recommend it as a good and interesting read.

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### **Michael says**

This was a great book

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### **Christopher Fuchs says**

A fascinating look at how the withdrawal of the Roman Empire from Europe affected tribal societies. Interesting information on Roman legions, provincial towns, tribal commanders, commodities, feuds, religion--many angles that feed a story about the establishment of the Merovingian Dynasty. Rich with the detail of an academic study but concise enough for the average history buff to get into.

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### **Lori says**

Great for those interested in taking the next step in learning European history. Most general history books skip over the Merovingians except for Clovis because it is very complicated and many of the names are similar. You don't have to remember all the details to get the general gist. Interesting things were going on even though it was complicated.

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### **Darryl says**

I liked it, mainly because a) it was well-written, and b) I didn't know a lot about the subject matter. It was a little hard to keep track of who was who with the unfamiliar names, and I wish more time would have been spent on how the development of Germany and France differed from pre-Charlemagne times. Overall, a good read for a layperson.

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## **George Girton says**

Liked it. Great sentence cadences to read aloud. Many unfamiliar names and places. Very different view of life at the edge of the Roman empire

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## **Chris Jaffe says**

This book is about the Franks during (and before) the Merovingian years – AKA that overlooked period between Rome and Charlemagne. This book seeks to understand the Franks of this period, how they evolved, how they operated – and why this period is so often overlooked. One key conclusion on that last point: they don't quite fit our notions of how kingdoms should work. The Carolingian dynasty had stronger kings. Rome had its emperors. Here, the kings were often supposed to reign, but not rule – though the system in place was predicated upon having these kings. Thus we trace Medieval kings through Charlemagne, but not these guys. And while there was still plenty of persisting ancient social structures of the Gallo-Romans around (a lot more than I would've guessed, actually), this wasn't really part of that world, either. Being neither fish nor fowl, it's been forgotten.

It's a really good book overall, but one part of the book isn't aging well. He keeps calling the Germanic tribes barbarians, even when they were adopting civilization. He's just going off tradition going back to Rome, but ...they don't come off as barbarians. A lot of writing now that recognizes the civilizing of the Germanic tribes tends to stay away from a loaded word like "barbarian" – but Geary dives in with it. That's probably a mistake. But while his word usage could be better, his analysis is strong.

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