Kingdoms of medieval civilization

History, Middle Ages

The fall of Rome and the rise of Germanic kingdoms marked the end of ancient times and the beginning of the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages, the center of Europeancultureshifted from the lands around the Mediterranean Sea to regions that had barely been touched by Greco-Roman civilization. A new civilization, medieval civilization, took shape during the early Middle ages (A. D. 500-1050). There were few strong rulers or governments in this period, and a political system grew up in which power was divided among many local lords (Perry, 1988,).

By the fifth century, Germanic peoples had established kingdoms in Italy, Spain, Gaul, and England. These lands formerly belong to Rome (Crofton, 1994, 254). At its height, the Roman Empire had been a world of cities with a rich culture. By the end of the Empire, many towns were abandoned as people fled to country estates. The center of political, social, and economic life shifted from city to countryside. Since the Germanic invaders were rural people, they did not try to revive the old cultural centers or build new ones of their own. The decline of Roman rule left the western and central Europe disorganized.

A new medieval style of government appeared in the kingdom of the Franks. A Germanic people, the Franks had migrated westward from their homeland in the valley of the Rhine River. As Rome's border defenses weakened in the fourth and fifth centuries, Frankish tribes settled in Roman territory. About 481 a Frankish ruler named Clovis united the various Frankish tribes and conquered the Romans and other Germans in northern Gaul. In 768, Charlemagne became king of the Franks. Charlemagne was an extraordinary figure in medieval history. Charlemagne expanded his kingdom by

conquering the Lombard kingdom in Italy and taking part of northern Spain from the Muslims.

He added Bavaria (in what is now Germany) to his kingdom and after terrible wars forced the Germanic Saxons to submit to his rule and convert to Christianity. Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of Rome in 800 which indicated that the Roman idea of strong centralized government had not died. Charlemagne's empire did not, however, have Roman law or political organization. Moreover, it had no great cities that could serve as centers of trade and learning. What Charlemagne did however, was to blend Germanic, Christian and Roman elements that came to characterize the civilization of the Middle Ages (Perry, 1988, 141-143).

The kingdom of Charlemagne break apart after his death and divided Europe which was then threatened with invasions from the Viking raiders (Vikings are the ancestors of the Swedes, Norwegians and Danes of today) from the north , the Magyars from Central Asia , and the Muslims. The terrible invasions went on until early in the tenth century and had terrible consequences for Western Europe. Like the earlier Germanic invasions, they weakened central authority, disrupted trade, hurt agriculture, and left settlements and monasteries in ruins. Few kingdoms had the capacity to protect its own people so that people no longer look to a central ruler for security. They turned instead to local lords who had their own armies.

As a result, western Europe had entered an age in which lords, not kings, held political power. In fact, kings at that that time were regarded only as chief feudal lord. Living in age of warfare and disorder, lords sought allies

among their fellow nobles. The basis for these alliances was the lords' land. In exchange for military assistance and other services, one lord granted land called a fief to another noble. The system of relationships that grew out of this granting of fiefs was called feudalism. It became the main political arrangement in Europe after the breakup of Charlemagne's empire in the ninth century.

In some ways, feudalism grew out of the traditions of the Germanic tribes. Feudal law included many elements of Germanic law and feudal attitudes reflected Germanicrespectfor the warrior (Perry, 1988, 144-145). Because they lived in violent times feudal lords built homes designed to serve as fortresses . The first castle was built in the ninth century at the time of the Viking raids. These castles were encircled by massive walls and strong guard towers. Sometimes, feudal lords would fight against each other for supremacy (Crofton, 1994, 265).

It is obvious therefore, that because of the disorder of territories brought about by the fall of Roman Empire, the Germanic kingdoms flourished, which combined the Germanic, Roman and Christian elements that characterized the western kingdoms of the medieval civilization. And as invasions plaqued the west from all quarters, small self-protecting feudal kingdoms governed by nobles or lords was established.

References

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