

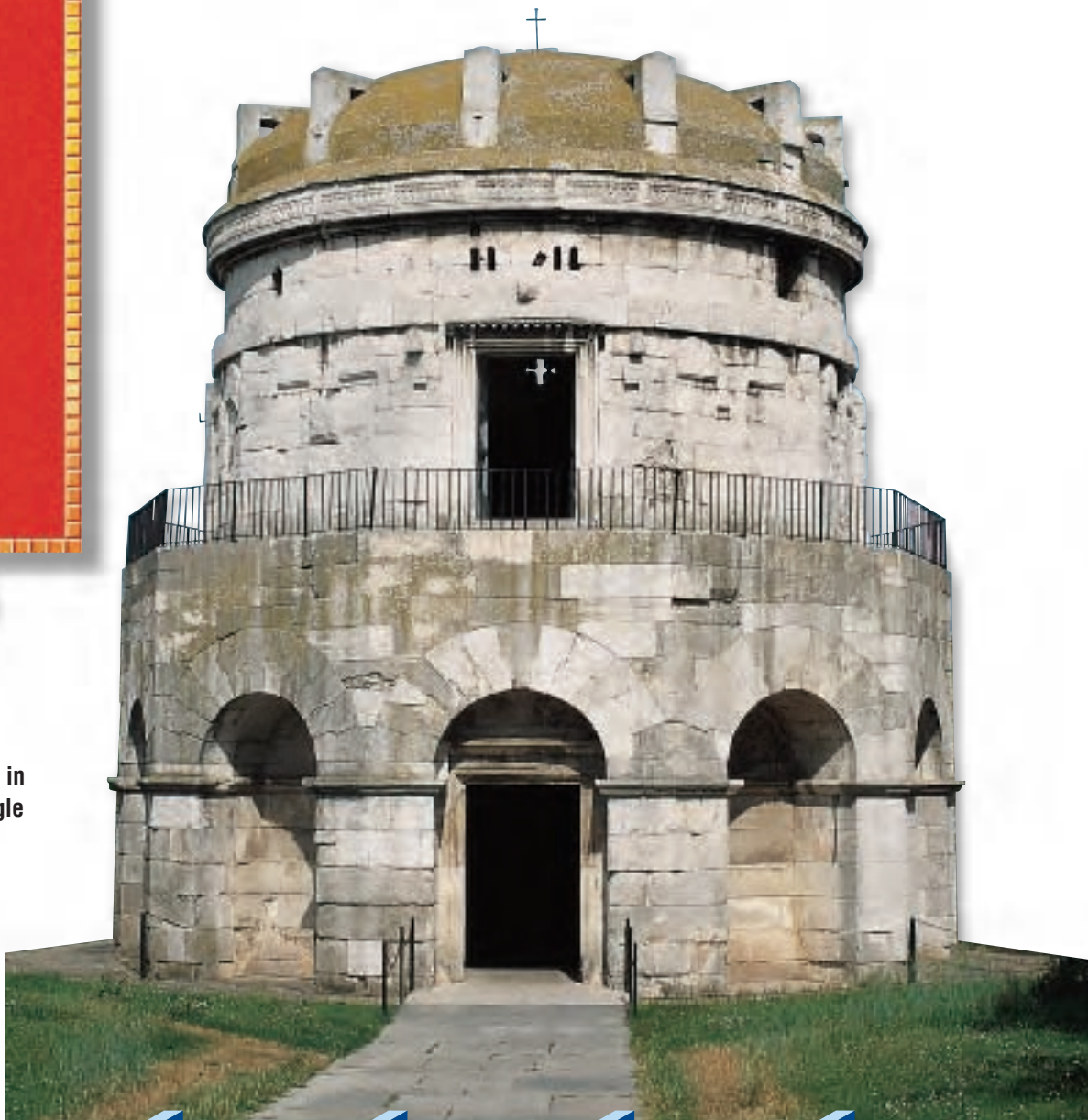
The Germans

300 A.D.—550 A.D.



▲ A Germanic brooch in the shape of an eagle

The mausoleum ►
of Theodoric
the Great



300 A.D.

Romans allow groups
of Germans to cross
their borders

378 A.D.

Battle of
Adrianople

410 A.D.

Alaric captures
Rome

455 A.D.

Vandals sack
Rome

550 A.D.

Roman Empire is
replaced by
Germanic kingdoms

Chapter Focus



Read to Discover

- What life was like in German villages.
- How the Germans' laws and love of battle influenced them.
- What role the Goths and Vandals played in the decline of the Roman Empire.
- What replaced the Roman Empire in the West.



Terms to Learn

clans
chieftain
blood feuds
oath-helpers
ordeal
wergeld



People to Know

Wodan
Thor
Atilla
Alaric
Odoacer
Theodoric



Places to Locate

Danube River
valley
Valhalla

Chapter Overview

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Why It's Important During the first 400 years after the birth of Christ, the Germans left the forests and marshes of northern Europe in search of warmer climates and better grazing land for their cattle. They slowly drifted south toward the Roman Empire.

Attracted by Rome's wealth and culture, the Germans hoped to live peacefully within the empire's borders. However, the Romans considered them enemies and for many years fought to keep the Germans out of Rome. By 300 A.D., however, the empire had begun its long decline and could no longer turn back the Germans. So the Romans allowed groups of Germans to move into the Danube River valley, where a blending of German and Roman ways took place.

SECTION 1 Village Life

Although the Germans took part in Roman life, they also kept much of their own culture. They lived in villages surrounded by farmlands and pastures. Most of the homes were long thatched-roof huts with an open space around them. The family lived in one end of the hut and divided the other end into animal stalls.



GERMAN VILLAGE The Germans built their villages just within the borders of the Roman Empire. There they became farmers. They lived in family groups that included parents, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. **What was a German home like?**

The body heat of the animals helped to warm the hut during the cold winters. Wooden tables and benches placed along the walls of the hut were the only furniture. A few wealthier villagers added wall hangings or carpets.

German villagers made their living herding cattle, which provided food and clothing. They also traded cattle for Roman glass vessels, table articles, and jewelry. The Germans farmed as well. They grew barley, rye, wheat, beans, and peas. Most farm work was done by women, children, and enslaved people. When the women were not working in the fields or cooking, they spun wool and wove cloth on upright looms.

German dress was simple. The women wore long skirts made of different yarns, or one-piece sack-like dresses that extended from the shoulders to the feet. Sometimes, they wore scarves or shawls fastened with a bone pin. The men wore short woolen *tunics*, or coat-like garments, and close-fitting trousers. They covered the tunics with cloaks fastened on the right shoulder with a brooch.

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HISTORY
Online

Student Web Activity

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The Germans believed in hospitality. So strong was this belief that it was against the law to turn away anyone who came to the door. Invited guests and strangers alike were welcomed, fed, and entertained. Feasting, drinking, and dancing were favorite German pastimes. Men also enjoyed gambling with dice. Sometimes, they took part in such organized sports as boxing and wrestling. In winter, they skated on frozen ponds and lakes using skates made of flat bone.

The Germans spoke a language that later became modern German. At first, they could not read or write because their language had no alphabet. However, some learned to speak and write Latin. Gradually, they began to use Roman letters to write their own language.

Warriors German men were warriors. They spent most of their time fighting, hunting, or making weapons. They began training for war when they were young boys. When a male reached manhood, he was brought before a special gathering held in a sacred grove under a full moon. There, he received a shield and a spear, which he had to carry with him at all times. The loss of the shield and spear meant loss of honor.

The Germans were divided into **clans**, or groups based on family ties. At first, the Germans gave their greatest loyalty to their clan. After a while, however, they developed a strong feeling of loyalty toward a military leader called a **chieftain** (chēf' tuhn). A man had to fight well to become a chieftain. In the beginning, a chieftain was elected by a band of warriors. Later, this office became hereditary.

Chieftains gave their men leadership, weapons, and a chance for wealth and adventure. They also kept peace among their warriors. In some cases, they gave their warriors food and shelter. In return, warriors gave their chieftains complete loyalty. Some even gave their chieftains credit for the brave deeds they themselves did. In battle, chieftains fought for victory, and warriors fought for their chieftains.

German warrior bands did not have fixed plans of fighting. Each band was small and usually fought on its own, apart from other bands. The bands made surprise raids against their enemies. Warriors on foot and on horseback would charge wildly, yelling in loud voices to frighten their foes. They fought with daggers, short swords, and heavy axes made of metal and stone. They carried light wooden shields and wore suits of leather. A successful attack provided warriors with enslaved people, cattle, and other treasures.

The Germans' love of battle was closely linked to their religion. Germans had many gods who liked to fight and to hunt. The chief god, Wodan (wōd' n), was the god of war, poetry, learning, and magic. Another god of war was Wodan's

People in History



Theodoric the Great

C. 454 A.D.–526 A.D.

Germanic King

Theodoric was king of the East Goths, a Germanic people from eastern Europe. When Rome fell in 476 A.D., he took part in the struggle. About 500 A.D., Theodoric declared himself king of Italy. As king, he encouraged the Roman and Germanic peoples to get along. He respected Roman customs, and during his reign peace and prosperity returned.



Reading Check

What are **clans**?
How did a German leader become a **chieftain**?

Linking Across Time

Public Assemblies Germanic people picked leaders and decided laws in public assemblies. All freemen—except “cowards”—took part in these meetings (left). The Germanic conquest of the Roman Empire helped spread this practice. It became the basis of later democratic assemblies, including modern-day town meetings (right). **How did the Germans record their laws?**



son Thor (thōr), who was also the god of thunder. The Germans believed that the sound of thunder came from Thor’s chariot wheels.

The Germans admired bravery. Like the Spartans, they expected their warriors to win in battle or to die fighting. The only German shields left on a battlefield were those of dead warriors. The Germans believed that goddesses carried the spirits of warriors who died in battle into the afterlife. There, in the hall of Wodan, called Valhalla (val hal’ uh), the warriors would feast and fight forever.

German Shield



Law The Romans believed that law came from the emperor. The Germans believed it came from the people. German rulers could not change a law unless the people approved.

The Germans based their laws on the customs of their ancestors. Instead of writing down the laws, the Germans memorized them and passed them from parent to child.

Reckless fighting, often caused by too much drinking, caused problems in German villages. The Germans wanted to keep such


fighters from becoming **blood feuds** (fyūds), or quarrels in which the families of the original fighters seek revenge. Blood feuds could go on for generations. To keep this from happening, the Germans set up courts. Judges listened to each side and tried to find a settlement that would bring peace to the village.


The Germans decided who was guilty or innocent in different ways. One way was by oath-taking. People accused of crimes would declare their innocence by oath. Then, they would be defended by **oath-helpers**. These were people who swore that the accused was telling the truth. The Germans believed that anyone who lied when taking an oath would be punished by the gods.


People accused of crimes could not always find oath-helpers to come to their aid. In such cases, guilt or innocence was decided by **ordeal** (ōr dēl'), or a severe trial. Accused persons had to walk barefoot over red-hot coals or put an arm into boiling water. The burns of the innocent were supposed to heal within three days. There was also ordeal by water. A person was tied hand and foot and thrown into a lake or river. The Germans viewed water as a symbol of purity. If a person sank to the bottom, he or she was innocent. If a person floated, he or she was guilty.

A person who was judged guilty was not always punished physically. Courts could impose fines called *wergeld* (wuhr' geld). The exact amount of the payment varied. For example, the wergeld for harming a chieftain was higher than the one for harming a warrior. In the same way, a fine for killing a young girl was greater than one for killing a woman too old to have children. Although courts could set these fines, they did not have the power to collect them. They had to depend on public opinion to make a guilty person pay the fine.

The German legal system did not treat all people fairly. A person's wealth and importance, rather than the seriousness of the crime, determined the penalty. German laws did, however, keep the peace.

 **Reading Check**
How did Germans try to prevent **blood feuds**?

 **Reading Check**
How did **oath-helpers** take part in German trials?

 **Reading Check**
Why would an accused person be required to go through an **ordeal**?

 **Reading Check**
What was a *wergeld*?

Section 1 Assessment

1. **Define:** clans, chieftain, blood feuds, oath-helpers, ordeal, *wergeld*.
2. What were some of the duties of a German chieftain?
3. What were some features of German religion?

Critical Thinking

4. **Making Inferences** Why do you think hospitality was so important to the Germans?

Graphic Organizer Activity

5. Draw this diagram, and use it to compare strengths and weaknesses of German law.

Strengths	Weaknesses



MAP STUDY

HUMAN SYSTEMS

In 472 A.D., Germanic people controlled about 20 percent of the western Roman Empire.

From which general directions did most of the Germanic people invade the western Roman Empire?

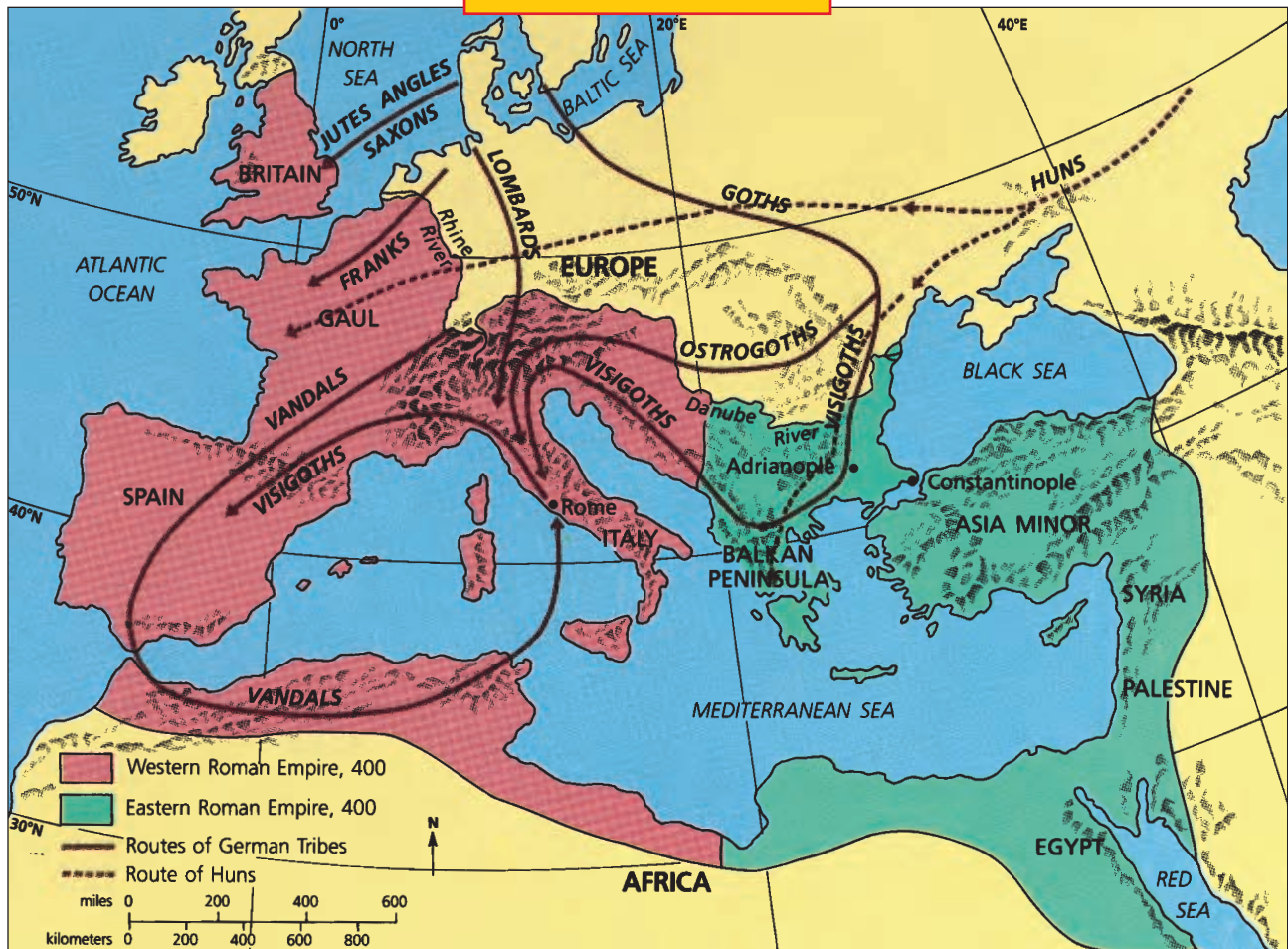
SECTION 2 The Conquerors

The Goths (gahths) were a Germanic people who lived in the Balkan Peninsula of Europe. They were divided into two groups called Ostrogoths (ahs' truh gahths), or East Goths, and Visigoths (viz' uh gahths), or West Goths.

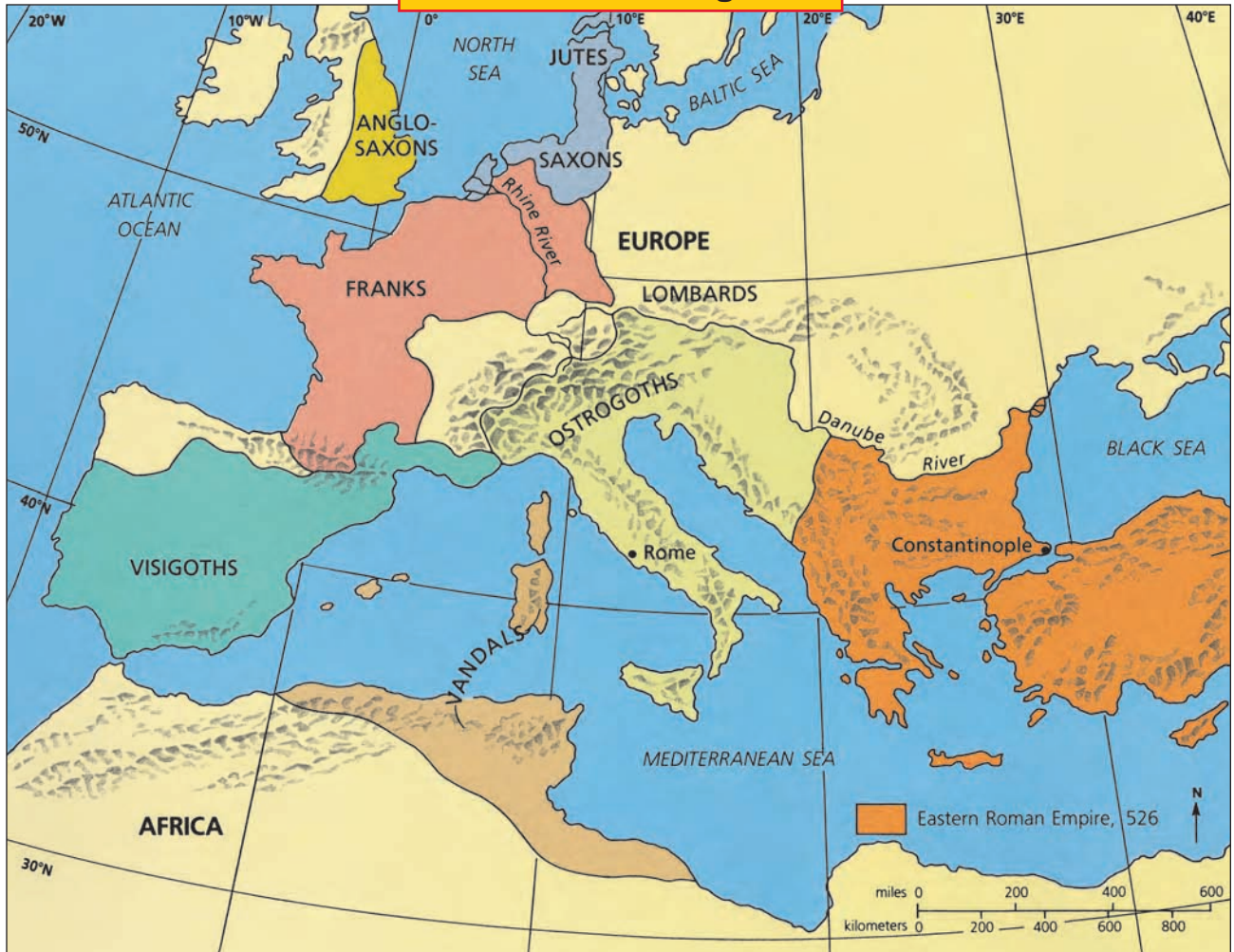
In the late 300s, both groups were attacked by the Huns led by Attila (at' uhl uh), or "Little Daddy." The Huns conquered the East Goths. The West Goths feared they would be next. So, they asked the Roman emperor for protection. He let them settle just inside the empire's frontier. In return, they gave up their weapons and promised to be loyal to Rome.

Before long, trouble broke out between the West Goths and Roman officials. The West Goths had to buy the empire's food at very high prices. The Romans also kidnapped many young West Goths and enslaved them.

Germanic Invasions



The Germanic Kingdoms



Finally, the West Goths rebelled against the Romans and defeated them at the Battle of Adrianople in 378. Then, in 410, led by the chieftain Alaric, they captured and looted Rome.

After the capture of Rome, the West Goths continued on to Gaul. Then, they moved into Spain, which was occupied by Romans and another Germanic group called Vandals (van' duhlz). The West Goths ended Roman rule in Spain, drove out the Vandals, and set up their own kingdom.

The Vandals in turn crossed the Mediterranean to North Africa. They became pirates and attacked cities along the Mediterranean coast. From these attacks came the English word "*vandalism*," meaning the willful destruction of property.

In 455, the Vandals attacked and burned Rome. They did, however, spare the lives of the Romans. Afterwards, the Vandals returned to North Africa. Like Rome's capture in 410 by the West Goths, this event shook the Roman world.



MAP STUDY

PLACES AND REGIONS

The Visigoths defeated the Vandals, who were forced to settle in North Africa. What advantage did the Vandals have because of their new location in the region?

The Germanic invasions were one of the three main reasons the Roman Empire in the West began to fall. While the Roman Empire in the East prospered, generals in the West fought for control of Rome and Italy.

In 476, a German general named Odoacer (öd' uh wā suhr) took control. He did not appoint an emperor. Instead, he ruled the western empire in his own name for almost 15 years. Then, a group of East Goths invaded Italy, killed Odoacer, and set up a kingdom under their leader Theodoric (thē ahd' uh rik).

By 550, the Roman Empire in the West had faded away. In its place were six major and a great many minor Germanic kingdoms. Many Roman beliefs and practices remained in use, and would shape later civilizations.

Section 2 Assessment

1. What happened to the East Goths in the late 300s? What effect did this have on the West Goths?
2. What did the Vandals do after leaving Spain?
3. What replaced the Roman Empire in the West?

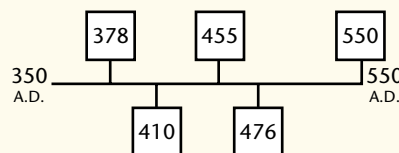
Critical Thinking

4. **Predicting Consequences** What do you think might have happened if

Roman officials had treated the West Goths fairly? Explain.

Graphic Organizer Activity

5. Draw this diagram, and use it to describe important events in the fall of Rome. (Key dates are given.)



Chapter Summary & Study Guide

1. About 300 A.D., groups of Germans began settling in the Roman Empire.
2. German warriors were organized into bands headed by military chieftains.
3. The Germans' love of battle was closely linked to their religion.
4. The Germans determined a person's guilt or innocence through use of oath-helpers and by ordeal.
5. The Germans believed that law came from the people.
6. The Huns conquered the East Goths and forced the West Goths to turn to Rome for protection.
7. Harsh treatment of the West Goths by the Romans set off a chain of events leading to the capture of Rome in 410 A.D.
8. A Germanic chieftain took control of Rome in 476 A.D., and by 550 A.D., the Roman Empire had been replaced by a number of Germanic kingdoms.



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Self-Check Quiz

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