

**German Historical Museum
Berlin**

German History in Pictures and Documents

Prestel Museum Guide

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German History in
Pictures and Documents

Edited by Leonore Koschnick
on behalf of the GHM

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German Historical Museum

GERMAN HISTORY IN PICTURES AND DOCUMENTS

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A Place with a History – A Place for History

The creation of a permanent exhibition using authentic objects to provide an informative and varied picture of more than 2,000 years of German and European history: this was the aim of an exceptional museum project which started in 1987 and ended in June 2006 with the opening of the permanent exhibition. In the main building of the German Historical Museum—the Berlin Zeughaus (Armoury)—more than 8,000 historical exhibits tell the story of people, ideas, events and historical processes in Germany from the first century BC to the present day.

The Background

The project originated in a debate, which had been carried on since the early 1980s, on the necessity and feasibility of a history museum as a central site for providing information as well as discussion on the phases of the common history of the Germans. The federal government took the initiative by founding, along with the state of Berlin, the German Historical Museum in 1987 and commissioning it to undertake preparations for the establishment of a permanent exhibition dealing with German history. A concept, drawn up in the year of foundation by a commission of experts consisting of 14 well-known German scholars, formed the starting point for the development of a collection of suitable exhibits, which started immediately, as well as for the planning of the future permanent

exhibition. Today this still forms one of the main guidelines for the work of the GHM. This concept designated that the permanent exhibition should be supplemented by a programme of temporary exhibitions which are housed in the Pei Exhibition Hall opened in 2003. This ongoing series of temporary exhibitions, initiated in 1988, aims to highlight the latest findings on individual aspects of German history and, in future, to expand the perspectives of the permanent exhibition in various directions. In addition, the major temporary exhibition projects of this youthful museum institution, under the direction of Christoph Stölzl, made it possible to obtain rapidly the vital experience expected in the field of international exhibitions.

In 1990, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany led to far-reaching changes for the GHM. The Museum for German History, which had been created by the government of the GDR in 1952, was located in the Armoury in East Berlin. The task of this institution was to create and transmit a vision of history, based on the teachings of historical materialism, which would guide the citizens of the GDR along the path to the formation of a new national identity shaped by socialism. The baroque building of the Armoury from 1700 on the Unter den Linden boulevard had been repaired after the war and provided an impressive setting for exhibitions. The last GDR government closed the Museum for German History in 1990 and, acknowledging the concept of the GHM, took the decision to transfer all the objects in its collections and its

buildings, including items dating back to the Middle Ages, from the former Military Museum in the Armoury to the GHM for further preservation and use, in the same year.

The Armoury became the new headquarters and the site for the establishment of the permanent exhibition of the GHM. The unification of the GHM collections, which were already substantial, and the old holdings from the Armoury as well as the new collections of the Museum for German History dealing with the history of the class struggle, resulted in a total of 750,000 museum objects. Very few museums world-wide have a comparable collection in terms of variety and both historical and material value.

In 1995, the GHM opened an exhibition entitled "Pictures and Objects" on the upper floor of the Armoury in which a selection of more than 2,000 exhibits documented the then state of the preparations for establishing a permanent exhibition. Due to its great success with the public, this exhibition remained open for approximately four years. However, the GHM's collecting and planning activities were not yet completed.

In 1999, the doors of the Armoury were closed and in the following five years it was renovated and re-equipped technically to become an exhibition location capable of satisfying most of the demands placed on an internationally renowned museum in the 21st century. In the year 2000, the first steps to the realisation of the permanent establishment, for which around 7,500 m² had become available after the renovations, were undertaken.

In close collaboration with the members of the expert committee, the management and academic staff of the GHM developed the structure of the exhibition, which was largely completed in 2003. The architect Jürg Steiner (design) and, later, Christian Axt (construction) took care of the creative planning for the presentation of the exhibits. The Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning had been responsible for the structural implementation of the plans and budget management since 2002. In summer 2005, construction of the exhibition architecture was begun and, in a record time of only about three months, from the end of February to the end of May 2006, the GHM installed the more than 8,000 exhibits in their exactly planned locations, and the permanent exhibition was opened on schedule.

Organisation and Tour

The exhibition space occupies the two main floors of the Armoury. On their tour, visitors pass through a series of chronologically arranged epochs which, in the overall perspective of the exhibition, unite to provide an overview of over two millennia of German history. On the upper floor we see depictions of the changing phases in German history, from the 1st century BC to the end of the First World War in 1918. The ground floor deals with the period of the Weimar Republic, the National Socialist regime, the post-war period and the history of the two German states from 1949 to their reunification in 1990 and the Allies' withdrawal in 1994. The final area is arranged as a perspectival space where media in-

stallations show the latest news—history as it happens, when it happens.

The space dedicated to each epoch is not identical but increases, corresponding to the size of the population and the number of preserved artefacts. Due to the scarcity of records the first section of the exhibition, which displays significant objects, including many archaeological finds, from the period of the Roman-Germanic settlement to the Late Middle Ages around 1500, can only provide an overview of the systems of rule and ways of life.

Beginning with the Renaissance and Reformation, an incomparably greater number of objects makes it possible for the GHM to provide an ever-expanding view of the historical processes of the following centuries. Portraits, scenes of events and political prints were created in those times as conscious statements on history.

A generously proportioned main route, offering broad perspectives through the building and exhibition architecture, opens up the permanent exhibition on the two Armoury floors.

This main route was conceived to provide an informative tour, during which visitors can become acquainted with all the most important exhibits, as well as the principal phases of German history. In addition, in each “epoch area” many rooms, dealing with specific themes and providing more detail, lead off the main route. Here, additional exhibits and descriptions provide a plethora of supplementary information on the relevant historical

personalities, major events and developments. On a third information level, innovative multimedia applications, specially developed in-house, as well as learning stations broaden the range of historical content shown. This three-tier organisation of the information offered in the exhibition permits visitors to set individual priorities when dealing with German history and to create their own tour, in keeping with the time they have available and their specific interests, without being forced to follow a predetermined path.

The chronological backbone of the permanent exhibition is a specially developed didactical information system in the form of a series of “milestones”. Placed along the main route, these milestones—designed as illuminated steles on a square base—provide fundamental information on a period of the epoch on each of their four sides. Short introductory texts are complemented by a time stream, as well as maps and statistics that help to make historic developments clear and understandable. In addition, an integrated coin showcase displays portraits of the rulers and state symbols on the commonly used currency. The “milestones” are placed in such a way that the following milestone is always in sight, creating a clearly visible line of markers along the main route.

A great deal of space is devoted to the darkest period in German history—the twelve years of National Socialist dictatorship. The GHM is currently the only museum in Germany able to provide a broad overview of the political and military history, as

well as of the mechanisms and crimes, of the National Socialist state.

The Aims of the Permanent Exhibition

The objects on display in the German Historical Museum’s permanent exhibition come from almost all areas of human life of the past and present. As historical testimony, they give visitors information on the past and answer questions on German history. This results in clear descriptions, as close as possible to the historical reality, on a wide range of conditions and the circumstances of life in each individual epoch. The focus of this examination is on the characteristic political and social problems of the period. In addition, wherever feasible, the various contemporary viewpoints and evaluations of historical events are placed alongside, and sometimes contrasted with, each other in order to provide as many perspectives as possible. As a clear contrast to the national museums of the 19th and 20th centuries, this permits us to avoid presenting a one-sided, linear or goal-directed view of historical processes. Our goal is a historically critical portrayal, differentiated according to epoch-specific criteria, of the varied developments and continuities, as well as the breaks and aberrations, in German history. In all cases the framework has been expanded to include Europe, so that German history is always shown in its European perspective. In this way, visitors from home and abroad will be given the opportunity of obtaining thorough information on all major aspects of the difficult history of the Germans that could serve as a good

basis for forming their personal judgement and further consideration of the subject.

In spite of all historically determined differences in detail, the permanent exhibition continually provides information on a conceptually clearly defined set of basic conditions of political, cultural and social existence in the German-speaking world over the centuries. In order to heighten awareness of these areas, eight main questions are asked at the outset to help visitors take in the abundance of exhibits and information:

- **Germany – where is it?**
- **The Germans – what unites them?**
- **Who ruled, who obeyed, who offered resistance?**
- **What did the people believe, how did they see their world?**
- **What did the people live from?**
- **Who, with whom, against whom? Conflict and cooperation in society**
- **What leads to war, how is peace made?**
- **How do the Germans see themselves?**

The exhibition does not explicitly answer these questions but leaves it to the visitors to find their own explanations and interpretations, based on what they have seen. Historical information is intentionally not transmitted as in a lecture, proclaiming the absolute truth, but as a kind of manual for approaching the past from the perspective of our time. Fundamentally, the exhibition makes no claim to present a comprehensive overview of everyday life, work and living conditions but takes as its subject political history, which

was and still is formed by rulers, politicians, communities and societies. Our main focus is on the cities and, later, the parliaments. The essential information is provided as a form of political iconography made up of signs, symbols and pictures.

A depiction of the 2,000 years of German history using material from the past also demands appropriate treatment of the objects with regard to their character as historical evidence. Documents, books, paintings and engravings were usually produced some time after the relevant historical events and fulfilled a specific purpose or a particular commission to provide posterity with an individual, intentional view of history. In spite of their recognisable form, precious items, ceremonial weapons and other luxury objects were actually not used as everyday articles but as conspicuous symbols in the context of ceremonial proceedings. It is only by understanding their changing historical use that their value as evidence becomes apparent. In addition, articles from everyday life, including simple utensils, tools, dishes and clothing as well as simple religious objects, which were originally not intended to be handed down through time, were preserved by the following generations as a remembrance of events in everyday life or a particular person. Today these objects often provide a more vital and immediate feeling for historical occurrences than any other source. In order to sharpen visitors' appreciation of such sources for interpretation, the exhibition relates each object to other articles or groups of articles, making their original use and importance tangible.

In some places, the visitor is also confronted with partial reconstructions of small ensembles—for example, a medieval living room, the hall of a baroque residence, a living room from the historicist period, or period rooms showing living conditions around 1900, all including original pieces. This contextualisation of the exhibits creates a conscious contrast to the aesthetically based isolation of historical objects in other museums and exhibitions, and forms one of the central principles in the exhibition methods and didactics of the GHM. In the permanent exhibition, contextualisation forms the basis for the extensive depictions of aspects of the history of culture, mentality and ideas, the documentation of which forms an additional main issue and which are closely entwined with the presentation of events. In principle, all the exhibits

serve not merely as illustrations of historical interpretations but as relics of the process of history, testifying to the reality of life. Here, visitors are required to sharpen their awareness and become involved in the non-verbal communication of the exhibits. The language spoken by these objects is more direct and clearer than it appears to be at first.

With the help of some carefully selected exhibits, this book attempts to show how the objects displayed in the permanent exhibition of the GHM in the Armoury give an account of German history in the European context. These texts are accompanied by a cordial invitation to visit the museum and experience a unique exhibition project.

Hans Ottomeyer
July 2008

The Collections of the German Historical Museum

Dieter Vorsteher

In 1987, the founding fathers of our museum said: “The importance of the German Historical Museum will stand or fall with the successful development of a convincing collection”. Today, we are proud to have one of the most important collections dealing with German history. The commission we received and many strokes of luck have resulted in a “treasure chamber”. With all due respect to the popular modern museum architecture of Ieoh Ming Pei and the baroque façade of the Armoury, this varied collection will form the heart of the museum. Its quantity and quality are the greatest assets for the future of the German Historical Museum. Its importance is the result of integrating numerous specialised collections, of which many were founded generations ago.

One of the greatest windfalls for the German Historical Museum was the country’s reunification in October 1990. Its transfer from Charlottenburg into the Zeughaus (Armoury), Unter den Linden 2, unexpectedly gave it an address in the heart of the capital city Berlin. This change in location was accompanied by our taking over the collections of the former Museum for German History of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In addition to their collections dealing with the political history of the GDR, the history of the workers’ movement, the KPD and the SED, the “caretakers” of the Museum for German History had succeeded in creating specialised collections, ranging from the

Reformation to the Peasants' Wars, from poster art to everyday culture, over the previous four decades.

The GDR museum and its permanent exhibition have now become history. The arrangement of the exhibits, in keeping with its ideology, was abandoned in spring 1991. The ideological glue binding the objects and their message cracked along with the fall of the society of the GDR. The objects have been removed from the showcases of the permanent exhibition, from the "arsenal" of class struggle, to the depots, where, in isolation, they are first of all neutralised and separated from their ideology.

rooms were dedicated to patriotic commemoration of the 1813–1815 Wars of Liberation and, later, gradually transformed into a new type of building—the museum. The building, which had been erected to represent the state and demonstrate regal power, now attracted the interest of the patriotic public. After the foundation of the German Empire in 1871, it became a site for developing national feeling. The pantheon, which Emperor Wilhelm I opened in 1886, decorated with murals of scenes from the Wars of Unification of 1864–1871 in the North Hall and the inner courtyard, now roofed over,



Here they are catalogued, researched, stored and preserved.

The collections of the former Royal Prussian Armoury were another stroke of luck in the short history of the German Historical Museum. Since 1701, the trophies and arsenal of weapons of the Prussian kings had been stored there. After 1830, some

View of the GHM's first exhibition:

"1. 9. 39 – An Attempt at Dealing with Memories of the Second World War"

September 1989, in the basement of an industrial complex in Berlin Charlottenburg

transformed the former arsenal into a Prussian museum of history.

Not only the house, but also the collections were given a new charter after 1871. They were intended to explain to the public the creation of

had realised the ideas of the national movement with the foundation of the empire in 1871. The collected items were no longer the ragged soldier's cap from the Wars of Liberation of 1813–1815, no longer a scratched,



**“Art and Armaments Chamber”
on the upper floor of the Armoury,
north wing**

Michael Karl Gregorovius, 1835,
Oil on canvas, Potsdam, Stiftung
Schlösser und Gärten, Sanssouci
(GK I 3893)

the German national state through the battles fought by Prussian generals and their princes. Sections of the collection, consisting of seized trophies and the country's own military hardware, permitted the creation of a view of history which construed harmony between the princes and citizens: the Prussian royal house

dented Dreyse needle-gun from the Franco-Prussian War, but a patriotic testimony to one of the “holy battles” of the nation. These objects received their supernatural aura from being displayed in the halls of the Armoury, which had now become a national museum.

What had been a reminder of the patriotic past for two generations, was regarded by later visitors as atrocious. In the Weimar Republic, after 1919, the collection and the museum staff went through their first demilitarisation.

Twenty years later the Armoury once again became an arena for show-

ing objects seized by the German Wehrmacht during its first campaigns. Later, following two lost world wars, the memories of the German Empire and “Third Reich” had become as empty as the Armoury itself. The collections had been removed or stolen. Even the building—now seen as a symbol of militarism—was in danger of being demolished.

There was hardly a single important group in the young GDR, except a few military historians, that regretted the loss of the complete Armoury collections. When a small part of the collection, which had been confiscated in 1945, was returned to the GDR by the Soviet Union in 1958, this hoard of military items was of only marginal importance for the Museum for German History, which had been established in 1952. These objects functioned merely as props, as an illustration of the class enemy and bogeymen called feudalism, absolutism and the monarchy, things Prussian and militarism, imperialism and fascism. Even today, there is only hesitant acceptance that these historical objects can supply many kinds of information on weapons technology, military structures, strategy, forms of representation, arts and crafts, industry and many other topics. The collection from the original Armoury provides an outstanding documentation of the history of European power and conflicts. This oldest resource in the history of its collections is both a challenge and a mission for the German Historical Museum. It requires care, augmentation and also the search for missing individual pieces and holdings.

The third, and probably final, stroke of luck concerns the acquisi-

tions made by the German Historical Museum itself. In keeping with enlightened ideals and the European spirit of international understanding, the permanent exhibition of the museum will illustrate German history within the context of our neighbouring countries. We were able to achieve this goal in summer 2006. The European dimension has greatly widened our horizons in viewing our common history. In this we differ significantly from the approaches of



Weapons collection on the upper floor of the Armoury

October 1916

Firearms from the 17th and 18th centuries on the ground floor of the Armoury, east wing

1930

the two previous institutions. When developing its collection, the German Historical Museum looked back over the entire history of the Empire since Charlemagne, as an idea for the formation of Europe, to Charles V's idea of a "monarchia universalis" at the beginning of the modern age and to the House of Habsburg, to Napoleon's dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in 1806 and the creation of new, national states in the Europe of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hegemonic claims and the struggle for a balance of power are a continual discordant presence through European history. The Janus-faced twentieth century, with its cruel and bloody first half and

a second half characterised by reconciliation and policies of peace, is also extensively represented in the collections and permanent exhibition.

The German Historical Museum was able to acquire impressive exhibits to satisfy its ambitious assignment. The way articles were purchased at auction, bought, obtained through a friendly approach, donated to us and brought to our attention, was unique and unprecedented—and, in many cases, this would no longer be possible today. Guided by a lucky star, the success of the German Historical Museum silenced the sceptics and critics. It was only this collecting activity which made it possible for us to satisfy the requirements of



The "Revolution 1848" Exhibition in the Museum for German History before being dismantled, 1990

showing German history in the European context.

The traditional maxim of "collecting, preserving, exhibiting" might sound



**The “Iron Garments” Exhibition
in the German Historical Museum
1992**

simple, but today it is still the secret of successful museum work. For the public, the last-mentioned, exhibiting, is the most important. Museums gain their attractiveness and popularity by exhibiting, and rarely through the secret passion for collecting and the toils of preservation. This means that collecting gains its legitimacy principally from displaying the objects collected, from presenting them in exhibitions. Of course, the buildings are also a part of the museum experience—museums that take your breath away. But what would the most beautiful museum be without a collection? It would be like a church without God, a silent concert hall—no collection, no museum!

Put into numbers, the German Historical Museum possesses over 800,000 paintings, graphic works, posters, documents, pieces of technical equipment, militaria, textiles and everyday objects and arts and crafts. The specialised library with more than 200,000 volumes, and a photo archive built up in the 1990s with

500,000 images—of objects from the collection and historical events of the twentieth century—and more than two million negatives, can be used by researchers and interested members of the public. The online data bank contains over 200,000 records, almost half of them accompanied by an illustration. Eight thousand objects from this richly varied heritage are included in the current permanent exhibition. Is the very size of the collection not open to criticism? Is the effort needed to expand and take care of the collection not out of all proportion to its usefulness?

Collecting means tracking down questions. One must never cease. Even after the permanent exhibition has been opened, there will be no end to questions concerning the present day and our common history. “If you want to read about the future, you have to leaf through the past”

(André Malraux). And a permanent exhibition does not mean that objects and thoughts come to a standstill—today’s questions will be different tomorrow and the collector knows that we will not be able to consult or exhibit what we do not collect and preserve today. In addition to perseverance and continuity, collecting is characterised by knowledge, sensitivity and a vision: knowledge about the past, a seismographic feeling for current indicators and an idea about the future questions of a new society. When collecting, we make a conscious—and sometimes unconscious—decision about the capabilities and content of the memories of future generations. We influence their impression of our present time. He who does not collect today, will not exist tomorrow. Collecting is essential to life, for recalling one’s own family history just as the history of society as a whole or a nation. On the other hand, the “*damnatio memoriae*”, banishment from memory, is the historical equivalent of the death penalty.

Collecting historical evidence is a time-tested procedure, vital for all societies. Its beginnings reach far back into the history of societal development. In a word: he who collects, survives in history. As an impartial chronicler—that is, at least, our aim—the German Historical Museum also collects pictures and documents for those who do not have the privilege or time to collect themselves.

Collecting is an act of self-reassurance, of defining one’s position in today’s world, a search for traces of possible allies from times gone by. It means tracking down deeds and

ideas, the plans and remains of a multitude of biographies. The collector documents ideals, preserves the memory of selected models and gives direction in times of need and options for survival training.

Collecting is listening for signals from the past. Each collection is a kind of “Noah’s Ark”. On board we find worlds of memory that give strength and hope for today and for future life. Collectors are prophets, custodians and fortune-tellers. With our collection, we construct the houses and huts of future generations. We hope that the new exhibition building and the extensive depot will prove to be a seaworthy “Noah’s Ark”, a message in a bottle for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

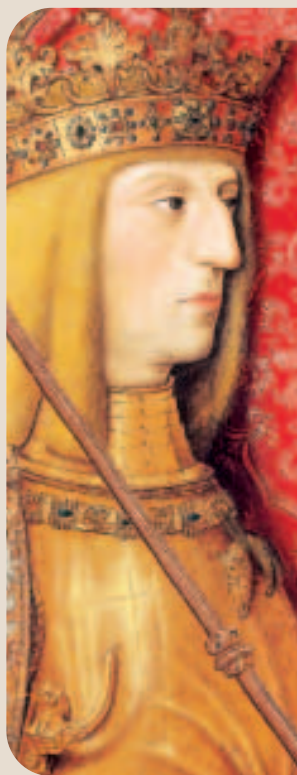
Around the time of the birth of Christ, Europe was populated by Germanic peoples in the north and Celts in the south and west. The advance of the Germanic tribes over the central German uplands and the expansion of the Romans as far as the Rhine and Danube led to the loss of the Celts' political and cultural independence.

The Romans were later no longer permanently able to resist pressure from the

100_{BC} – 1500

Germanic tribes. The deposition of the last West Roman emperor in 476 marked the beginning of the downfall of the Roman Empire in western Europe. The culture of Roman late antiquity did not disappear but, in a transformation process, laid the foundations for what would later become Europe. The traditions and settlement patterns of the Romans, as well as of the Celts and Germanic peoples, have remained alive until the present day.

However, in the eyes of many in the Middle Ages, the Roman Empire had never fallen. It continued to exist in the form of the later so-called Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, survived the Reformation at the change from the Middle Ages to the modern age and finally came to an end only in the Napoleonic wars in 1806. It formed the terms of reference for political activities in Germany, even though its deficiencies became more and more apparent. As a result of internal reform movements, the Empire had achieved the necessary amount of sovereignty at the end of the Middle Ages to enable it to meet the challenges resulting from religious schism and confrontation with the other European powers.



Celts, Germanic Tribes and Romans

The Celts' settlement area reached from France across western and southern Germany to Hungary. The Celts lived in town-like settlements as well as individual farms and villages. Their trade routes linked the Mediterranean with the Baltic. The Celts slowly disappeared under the pressure of the Romans and Germanic peoples. Celtic and Roman culture amalgamated in southern and western Germany.

The origins of the Germanic peoples lie on the Baltic. They had advanced far into central Europe at around the time of Christ's birth. Unlike the Celts, they were never Romanised, as the Roman conquest of northern Germania came to a stop with Varus' Battle in 9 AD.

Germanic peoples and Romans came into contact with each other in many ways—both in conflict and friendship. Many members of the Germanic tribes sought contact with Roman culture. They served as mercenaries in the Roman army or adopted the Romans' style of living and their ideas, becoming the heirs to ancient Roman civilisation.

The Roman Empire united a large part of Europe and created a common monetary and legal system. Advanced technology, a high organisational standard and a culture based on the written word are still influential today. Newly founded cities became centres of trade and politics. Remains of streets, bridges, gates and aqueducts have been preserved until present times.

Christian communities were founded in the Roman cities of Trier, Cologne and Augsburg as early as the second century. The church became an intermediary between ancient times and the Middle Ages.

Bird fibula

Mülhofen, Mayen-Koblenz district,
6th century

Silver, glass inlay

On loan from: Museum for Pre- and
Ancient History, National Museums Berlin—
SPK; photo: C. Plamp

The Germanic peoples can be divided into the western, northern and eastern Germanic tribes. Texts and finds from graves give evidence of their social structure. A small group of nobles ruled. A following of young



men was concentrated around these nobles. The majority of the population lived as free farmers, eligible for military service, but the written sources also mention serfs and slaves. Women had a subordinate role in society but often possessed considerable personal wealth.

The men wore belted, knee-long smocks and long trousers; the women wore quite long dresses, belted beneath the bust. Cloaks were fastened at the shoulder by a metal fibula. Weaponry consisted of a wooden spear with an iron head, either a long or short sword and a painted shield. Helmets were only worn by a few noblemen.



Mosaic from the floor of a house in Roman Trier

Trier 225/250

Stone and glass mosaic

On loan from: Rhine Museum Trier, restored with assistance from the Ernst von Siemens Foundation

Urban culture was a characteristic of Roman civilisation. A series of Roman military bases with fortified camps stretched along the Rhine and Danube. Protected by this “limes”, cities were founded as military, administrative, religious and trade centres. Roman architecture, with functional stone buildings, streets, bridges and aqueducts, is representative of a culture whose quality remained unequalled for a long time thereafter. After the end of Roman rule, many cities kept their importance as episcopal sees.

Estates, the “*villae rusticae*”, were important for supplying the cities and forts and were often granted to veterans of the Roman army. They consisted of living quarters designed to impress, a comfortable bathhouse and outbuildings. Lavish mosaic floors were a mark of the quality of Roman life in the cities and countryside.

Funeral urn in the form of an amphora

Probably Cologne 3rd/4th century

Glass

(1986/34)

As a rule, adult Romans were cremated after their death and their ashes interred in an urn. Funeral offerings, either burned or unburned, were added. According to the law, cemeteries had to be located outside the settlements. They were often to be found along major roads such as the Via Appia near Rome or the main road for trade between Trier and Cologne.

Funeral urns were originally made of ceramic material. However, rich



Romans preferred glass. This material was an absolute luxury, normally only used for drinking vessels, bottles and for storing cosmetic articles. Glass urns were also to be found in the Cologne area, where fine glassware was produced after AD 200.

From the “Völkerwanderung” Migration Period to Charlemagne

In 375, the invasion of an Asiatic tribe of horsemen, the Huns, started a period of unrest which lasted until around 500. From the fourth century, natural disasters, climate change, population growth and social unrest led to large groups of people migrating from northern and eastern Europe to the south. The Roman Empire could neither ward them off at the frontiers nor integrate them internally. Around 500, the Imperium Romanum dissolved. Several Germanic peoples established their own kingdoms, which were to remain in existence for many generations, on its territory.

The empire of the Franks, who had converted to Christianity, was founded in the fifth century along the Rhine and Seine and proved to be lasting. The king of the Franks, Pippin the Younger, formed an alliance with the pope in 754 without which the renewal of the Roman Empire through the Frankish king Charlemagne would not have been possible.

Charlemagne extended the Frankish kingdom over large areas of western, central and southern Europe. In the year 800 he was crowned emperor, ruler of the mightiest realm in Europe, by the pope in Rome. The Frankish and, later, the German kings and emperors became the defenders of Christendom. In keeping with the ideas of the time, coronation as emperor meant that the Franks had taken on the role of the Romans as rulers of the world.

In the ninth century, Emperor Charlemagne's successors divided the realm between themselves. From this, Germany, France and Italy later emerged.



Visigoth eagle fibula

6th century
Bronze
KG 97/62

After the fifth century, Germanic peoples founded kingdoms in the Roman provinces around the western Mediterranean: the Vandals in North Africa, the Visigoths in Spain, the Ostrogoths in Italy and the Lombards in northern Italy. In 711 the Visigoths were defeated by the Moors in Spain, in 774 the Lombards by the Franks in Pavia.

People of Germanic origin only formed a narrow upper class in these realms. They soon took on the local habits, customs and religion, and blended with the local population. In this way, they played their part in the transformation process of Roman civilisation.

The Goths had adopted the eagle symbol from the peoples of the Near East during their migration through southern Russia. At the same time, the eagle was also the Roman symbol of supremacy and therefore significant in both cultures. Eagle fibulas are typical clothing ornaments worn by the Germanic peoples of the migration period.

Fragment of the Heliand song

c. 830

Manuscript, parchment

R 56/2537

Christianity survived the fall of the Roman Empire in the seats of bishops along the Rhine. These cities provided support for the missionary work to the east of the Rhine, which was mainly carried out by Irish, Scottish and Anglo-Saxon monks.

Vernacular texts, which are among the earliest examples of the German language, were used for spreading the faith. The “Heliand”—



a 6000-verse, alliterated epic in Old Saxon from the middle of the ninth century—is one of these. Two almost complete specimens have been preserved along with four fragments.

Imperial denarius of Emperor Ludwig the Pious (778–840)

814–840

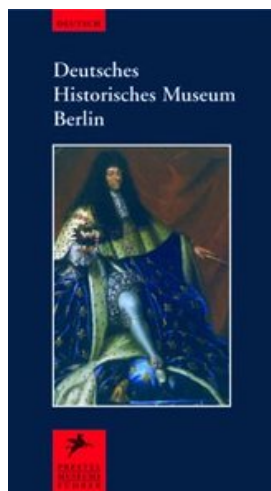
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As heirs to West Roman sovereignty, in legal and administrative matters



as well as in taxation and currency affairs, the Franks carried several important aspects of Roman civilisation into the Middle Ages. The kingdom of the Franks consisted of what is today France, southern and western Germany as well as the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. Emperor Charlemagne extended it to the north, east and south. From 772 to 804 he warred against the Bavarians and Saxons, the Lombards in Italy, the Arabs, who were on the advance in Spain, and the Avars in Hungary.

Many reforms and institutions from his reign survived the end of the Carolingian empire. The silver “penny”, introduced by the Carolingians, remained the most important coin until well into the thirteenth century.



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