German Villages

Germanic Tribes
Franks
Vandals
Visigoths
Saxons.

Hamlets
German tribes lived in villages called hamlets. The villages were surrounded by farmland and pastures.

Houses
Homes were long thatched-roof huts. The family lived in one end and the animals lived in the other end in stalls. The body heat of the animals helped warm the hut. Wooden tables and benches were the only furniture. Rich villagers added wall hangings and carpets.

Description
They are described as men of giant stature, with fair skin, blue eyes, and long, yellow hair. Many of them were tall and broad-shouldered. Many of them were lean and even gaunt. Their skin pulled taut over muscles and bone from sheer hunger. Tacitus praises them for their bravery in war, for the bold and hardy life to which their sons were bred, for the deep respect which they paid to their women, for their faithful conduct and their kindness to strangers.

Farming
Germans made their living herding cattle. The soil was hard clay. Germans grew barley, rye, wheat, beans, and peas. Most of the farm work was done by women, children, and slaves. Women also cooked, spun wool, and wove cloth on upright looms.

Occupations
Milling, baking, vinting, brewing, carpentry, lapidary, farming, trapping, hunting.

Trade
Germans traded cattle for Roman glass vessels, table articles, and jewelry.

Population
There were no food surpluses, so population remained small, around one million.

Marriage
By age 13-14, male and female were ready for their rite of passage into adulthood, and matrimony. Marriages were less for love and more for political connections. Monogamy was the norm. Marriage for the barbarians was generally for life. Rare was the barbarian who never married.
**Women's Clothing**
Women wore long skirts made of different yarns. A one piece sacklike dress that went from the shoulders to the feet. They sometimes wore scarves or shawls fastened with a bone pin.

**Men's Clothing**
Men wore short woolen tunics and close fitting trousers. The tunic was covered with a cloak. The cloak was fastened on the right shoulder with a brooch. Wilderness and rural barbarians wore scant clothing.

**Entertainment**
Feasting, drinking, and dancing were favorites. Men enjoyed gambling with dice. They boxed and wrestled. In the winter, they skated on ice using skates made of flat bone.

**Toys**
Wooden dolls, warriors, and animals.

**Language**
The Germans' language became modern German. At first, they could not read or write because they did not have an alphabet. They learned to speak and write Latin.

**Warriors**
German warriors spent their time fighting, hunting, or making weapons. A boy received a shield and a spear at adulthood. Warrior clans were divided by family ties. German tribes were clan-based, with blood-loyalty the basis for all bands. A chieftain, a man who fought well, led all the clans. Chieftains were elected by the warriors. Later this office became hereditary.

**Chieftans**
Chieftans gave their men leadership, weapons, and a chance for wealth. They kept peace among the warriors. They gave the warriors food and shelter. Warriors gave complete loyalty.

**Warrior Bands**
Bands were small and they fought on their own. Bands made surprise raids on their enemies. They would charge wildly, yelling to frighten the enemy. Their weapons were daggers, short swords, and heavy metal or stone axes. They used light wooden shields. They wore suits of armor. Attacks provided slaves, cattle, and other treasures.
Religion

Wodan was the chief god. He was the god of war, poetry, learning, and magic. Thor, Wodan's son, was also the god of war and of thunder. Spirits carried dead warriors into the afterlife. The warriors would feast and fight forever in the hall of Wodan called Valhalla.

Law

Germans believed that law came from the people. German rulers could not change a law unless the people agreed. To show approval, warriors would bang their weapons against their shields. Laws were not written down. They were memorized and passed from parent to child. Blood feuds required the families of the original fighters to seek revenge. In peacetime, tribal assemblies made up of all free men and warriors decided issues of peace and war. They would elect temporary war chiefs, whose legitimacy ended after hostilities.

Guilty or Innocent

Oath-helpers

People who swore that the accused was telling the truth. Liars would be punished by the gods.

Ordeal

Walk barefoot over red-hot coals. Put arm in boiling water. Burns were to heal in three days. Tied up and thrown into a lake or a river. If the sank they were innocent. If they floated they were guilty.

Punishments

Punishments were not always physical. Courts could impose a fine called wergeld. The amount paid varied with the severity of the crime. All people were not treated fairly. A person's wealth and importance determined the penalty.

The Conquerors: The Germanic Tribes

History

0-100 AD, the Germanic tribes were not a real danger to Rome:
1) Poverty ensured poor armor and weapons
2) They had limited tactics, consisting of ambushes and a mass charge.
3) Divisions into numerous small tribes meant a lack of political cooperation.
4) There was no real, continual government beyond the clan.
**Goths**
Goths, originally from Sweden, lived in the Balkan peninsula. They were divided into two groups. Ostrogoths were the East Goths. Visigoths were the West Goths.

**Roman Immigration**
300 AD, Romans allow groups of West Goths to cross their borders and settle. By the 300s AD, there was a continual belt of barbarian tribes all along the Roman frontier. The fortified frontier ran from the North Sea to the Black Sea. They had to give up their weapons and promise to be loyal to Rome. Trouble broke out between the Roman officials and the West Goths. The Goths had to buy food at high prices. Romans made slaves of many young Goths.

**Rebellion by the Goths**
West Goths rebelled against the Romans. In 378 AD, West Goths defeated Romans at the Battle of Adrianople. Calvary eclipses the power of the foot soldier. In 410 AD, The Visigoths, led by Alaric, captured and looted Rome. Alaric was a general in the Roman army. Alaric ordered his army not to molest women or destroy churches. West Goths continued to Gaul. The weak West Roman emperor ceded southern Gaul to the Visigoths. Then they moved in to Spain. Their Spanish kingdom lasted until the Muslim conquest of the eighth century. The West Goths ended Roman rule and drove the Vandals out. The Visigoths set up their own kingdom.

**Huns**
Both groups were attacked by a tribe from Asia called the Huns. The Huns were a wild barbarian race which came from Asia. The warriors marching ahead, while vast trains of wagons rolled after. The wagons contained their women and children. They were of Mongol blood, short, dwarf-like men, but thick-set and powerful in build. They were very hardy, caring nothing for cold, heat, hunger, or hardship. They had flat noses, yellow faces, tiny eyes, and big, upstanding cheek-bones. The people of Europe believed that they were the offspring of demons. People dreaded them as much for their appearance as for their fury in attack.

**Attila the Hun**
Was the son of the Hun king Mundzuk. The leader of the Huns was named Attila ("Little Daddy") and he was a fierce leader. When Attila died a river was diverted. A tomb was created on the dry river bed. He was buried in full armor, sitting on his horse. He was surrounded by treasure. The river was returned to its former bed and covered the grave.

**Vandals**
The Vandals crossed the Mediterranean Sea to North Africa. They became pirates and attacked cities along the Mediterranean coast. In 455 AD, the Vandals attacked and burned Rome. They did spare the life of Romans. The Vandals then returned to North Africa.
Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire
407 AD, last Roman legion leaves Britain.
In 476 AD, the last Roman emperor was overthrown by Odoacer.
Odoacer ruled the western empire for 15 years.
East Goths invaded Italy.
489 AD, Theodoric kills Odoacer at a dinner meeting.
As Odoacer sits down Theodoric cleaves him from shoulder to thigh.
Theodoric remarked, "That he doesn't have any bones."
Theodoric becomes king.
In 500 AD, the Roman Empire was divided into small regions that were ruled by different tribes.

Dark Ages
The time period after the fall of the Roman Empire is sometimes called the *Dark Ages.*
Germanic leaders were not able to keep up the accomplishments of the Romans before them.
Much of Roman arts, medicine, literature, government, architecture, and science were forgotten.