

# READING GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

## DESIDERATA

by Judy Ferro

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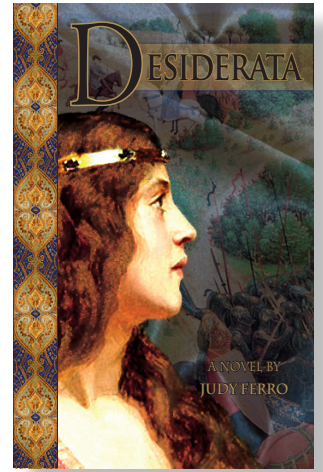
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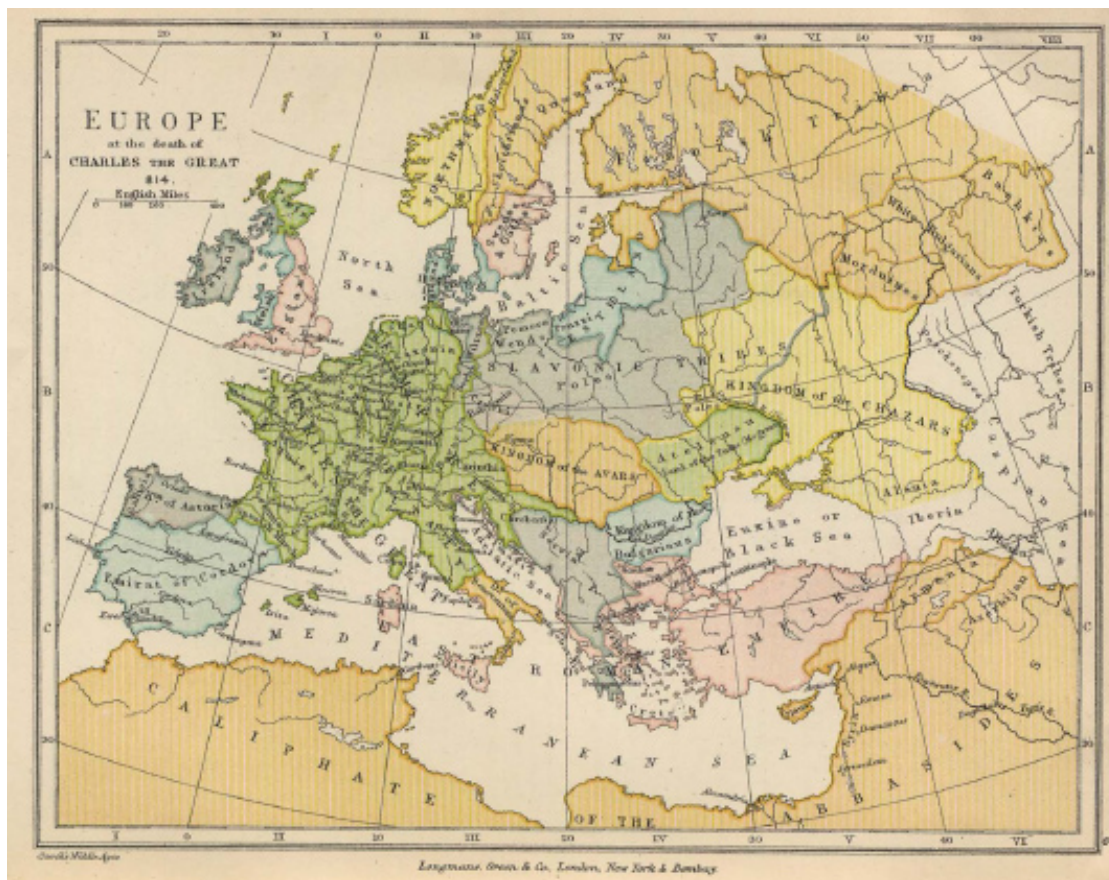
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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are your impressions of Desiderata's era? What is a regular day like for her, as compared to other women of the time? What are women's roles then? And men's? Would you like to live during this period?
2. How does Desiderata's relationship with Pepin I develop? Why does she dislike him so much at the beginning? And towards the end of the story? What does her repulsion of his physical appearance tell you about societal norms in medieval European society?
3. What obligations does Desiderata have as a member of the nobility that lower classes do not?
4. What is the role of religion in Charlemagne's court? How does that role compare or contrast to the relationship between governments and religion in the 21st century? Can you think of any countries today that have a relationship between the church and state like that of Charlemagne's era?
5. Do any of the story's characters remind you of people you know? Do any of them bear any resemblance to leaders, governments, or royal families of the 21st century?
6. What are Desiderata's strengths? And her weaknesses? Is she aware of her strengths or weaknesses at the beginning of the story? What events cause her to grow and change throughout?
7. Compare and contrast the portrayal of Charlemagne in the book and our modern perception of him as a great leader.
8. Does anything about the nature of family life during this time surprise you? You might think of issues such as living with your servant, living around stepbrothers and –sisters and their mothers, or being separated from your parents at a young age for political reasons. Can you think of others? Would you like to be a part of this kind of social structure? Why or why not?
9. During this period, women and servants did not usually go to school. What might be some of the reasons? What hobbies or chores principally occupied their time instead of education? What would your preference be between those tasks and pastimes, and studying?

10. How does the author's description of the royal courts surroundings (their dwellings, clothing, movement, and chores) compare with your own impression of Charlemagne and Desiderata's time period, before reading the book?
11. What do you think of Charlemagne when you learn that he gave the same name to two of his sons, and his reasons why? Can you understand his actions?
12. If you were in Desiderata's place and you knew about a secret plot against the king, what decision would you make? Would you participate? Would you inform someone about it? For what reasons?
13. What does the mention of conquering and migration of peoples tell you about land and populations in medieval Europe? Look at the following map and define where modern state borders approximately lie. What has changed? What does the map tell you about the differences between a territory, a kingdom, and a nation-state?
14. Again looking at the map, what do the borders of Charlemagne's kingdom tell you about the physical geography of Europe? What do you think it would have been like to cross these long distances and boundaries like rivers and mountain ranges on foot or on horseback?
15. What would people from Desiderata's community think of you owning a book, of modern public libraries, or of bookstores where hundreds of books can be purchased by anyone? Would it be viewed as a positive or negative phenomenon?



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