Charlemagne (Charles the Great)

Charlemagne (Charles the Great) was king of the Franks and Christian emperor of the West. He did much to define the shape and character of medieval Europe and presided over the Carolingian Renaissance.

Charlemagne was born in the late 740s near Liège in modern day Belgium, the son of the Frankish king Pepin the Short. When Pepin died in 768, his kingdom was divided between his two sons and for three years Charlemagne ruled with his younger brother Carloman. When Carloman died suddenly in 771, Charlemagne became sole ruler.

Charlemagne spent the early part of his reign on several military campaigns to expand his kingdom. He invaded Saxony in 772 and eventually achieved its total conquest and conversion to Christianity. He also extended his dominance to the south, conquering the kingdom of the Lombards in northern Italy. In 778, he invaded northern Spain, then controlled by the Moors. Between 780 and 800, Charlemagne added Bohemia to his empire and subdued the Avars in the middle Danube basin to form a buffer state for the eastern border of his empire.

In 800 a rebellion against Pope Leo III began. Charlemagne went to his aid in Rome and defeated the rebellion. As a token of thanks, Leo crowned Charlemagne on Christmas Day that year, declaring him emperor of the Romans. Although this did not give Charlemagne any new powers, it legitimised his rule over his Italian territories and attempted to revive the imperial tradition of the western Roman emperor.

The immense territories which Charlemagne controlled became known as the Carolingian empire. Charlemagne introduced administrative reforms throughout the lands he controlled, establishing key representatives in each region and holding a general assembly each year at his court at Aachen. He standardized weights, measures and customs dues, which helped improve commerce and initiated important legal reforms. He also attempted to consolidate Christianity throughout his vast empire. He persuaded many eminent scholars to come to his court and established a new library of Christian and classical works.

Charlemagne died in 814. His successors lacked his vision and authority, and his empire did not long outlive him.

The Carolingian Empire (800–924) was the final stage in the history of the early medieval realm of the Franks, ruled by the Carolingian dynasty. The size of the empire at its zenith around 800 was 1,112,000 square kilometers (429,000 sq mi), with a population of between 10 and 20 million people.

With its division in 843, it also represents the earliest stage in the history of the Kingdom of France and the Kingdom of Germany, which in the High Middle Ages would emerge as the powerful monarchies of continental Europe, Capetian France and the Holy Roman Empire, and by extension the predecessor of the modern nations of France and Germany. The beginning of the Carolingian era is marked by the coronation of Charlemagne, or Charles the Great by Pope Leo III at Christmas of the year 800, and its end with the death of Charles the Fat in 888, although kings of Italy continued to claim the nominal title of Emperor until 924.
Because Charlemagne and his ancestors had been rulers of the Frankish realm earlier (his grandfather Charles Martel had essentially founded the empire during his lifetime, and his father, Pepin the Short, was the first King of the Franks), the coronation did not actually constitute a new empire. Most historians prefer to use the term "Frankish Kingdoms" or "Frankish Realm" to refer to the area covering parts of today's Germany and France from the 5th to the 9th century.

- See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolingian_Empire

The Carolingian dynasty (known variously as the Carlovingians, Carolingus, Carolings or Karlings) was a Frankish noble family with origins in the Arnulfing and Pippinid clans of the 7th century AD. The name "Carolingian" (Medieval Latin karolingi, an altered form of an unattested Old High German karling, kerling, meaning "descendant of Charles", cf. MHG kerlinc) derives from the Latinised name of Charles Martel: Carolus.

The Franks (Latin: Franci or gens Francorum) are historically first known as a group of Germanic tribes that inhabited the land between the Lower and Middle Rhine in the 3rd century AD, and second as the people of Gaul who merged with the Gallo-Roman populations during succeeding centuries, passing on their name to modern-day France and becoming part of the heritage of the modern French people. Some Franks raided Roman territory, while other Frankish tribes joined the Roman troops of Gaul. In later times, Franks became the military rulers of the northern part of Roman Gaul. With the coronation of their ruler Charlemagne as Imperator Romanorum by Pope Leo III in 800 AD, he and his successors were recognized as legitimate successors to the emperors of the Western Roman Empire.

The Carolingian Renaissance, the first of three medieval renaissances, was a period of cultural activity in the Carolingian Empire occurring from the late eighth century to the ninth century, taking inspiration from the Christian Roman Empire of the fourth century. During this period there was an increase of literature, writing, the arts, architecture, jurisprudence, liturgical reforms, and scriptural studies.

The Carolingian Renaissance occurred mostly during the reigns of the Carolingian rulers Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. It was supported by the scholars of the Carolingian court.
notably Alcuin of York. Charlemagne's *Admonitio generalis* (789) and his *Epistola de litteris colendis* served as manifestos.

The effects of this cultural revival were largely limited to a small group of court *literati*: according to John Contreni, "it had a spectacular effect on education and culture in *Francia*, a debatable effect on artistic endeavors, and an unmeasurable effect on what mattered most to the Carolingians, the moral regeneration of society". Beyond their efforts to write better Latin, to copy and preserve patristic and classical texts, and to develop a more legible, classicizing script (the Carolingian minuscule that Renaissance humanists took to be Roman and employed as humanist minuscule, from which has developed early modern *Italic script*), the secular and ecclesiastical leaders of the Carolingian Renaissance for the first time in centuries applied rational ideas to social issues, providing a common language and writing style that allowed for communication across most of Europe.

- See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolingian_Renaissance