Charlemagne
History 101 - Fast Forward
Fall 1996
PREPARED BY:

SUBMITTED: September 30, 1996

Charlemagne, or Charles the Great, King of the Franks (742-814), was a strong
leader who unified Western Europe through military power and the blessing of the
Church. His belief in the need for education among the Frankish people was to
bring about religious, political, and educational reforms that would change the
history of Europe.
Charlemagne was born in 742 at Aachen, the son of Pepin(or Pippin) the Short and
grandson of Charles Martel. His grandfather, Charles, had begun the process of
unifying western Europe, in the belief that all people should be Christian.
Charlemagne's father, Pepin, continued this process throughout his rule and passed
his beliefs on to Charlemagne. All three, in addition to the political
unification, believed that the church should be reformed and reorganized under the
Pope, which helped their rise to power as the Carolingian Dynasty. (Holmes 74)
Upon Pepin's death in 768, Charlemagne and his brother, Carloman, each inherited
half of the Frankish kingdom. Pepin, in the Merovingian tradition of the time,
split his kingdom between his two sons.   Three years later Carloman died and
Charlemagne took control of the entire kingdom. He inherited great wealth and a
powerful army, built by his father and grandfather. Charlemagne used the army and
his own skillful planning to more than double the size of the Frankish Kingdom.
(Halsall 15)
The world of Charlemagne was a heathen one, with many warring tribes or kingdoms.
Many of these tribes were conquered by Charlemagne, among them the Aquitanians, the
Lombards, the Saxons, the Bretons, the Bavarians, the Huns, and the Danes. The
longest of these battles was against the Saxons, lasting thirty-three years.
Charlemagne actually defeated them many times, but due to their faithlessness and
their propensity to return to their pagan lifestyle, the Saxons lost many lives in
the prolonged battles with the Franks. With each conquest the Frankish kingdom
grew, and with growth came additional power and responsibility for Charlemagne. In
each area of Europe that was taken over by Charlemagne, he removed the leaders if
they would not convert to Christianity and appointed new ones, usually someone with
high position in the Church. Those people who refused to convert or be baptized in
the church were put to death. (Holmes 75)
The Church played a vital role in the kingdom of Charlemagne. It gave a sense of
stability to Charlemagne's rule, and he in turn provided stability in the Church.
The people conquered by Charlemagne, after being converted to Christianity, were
taught through the Bible a unified code of right and wrong. It was necessary for
the Church to play a role in this education of the people, because only the clergy
were educated. (Boussard 92) The Church also guided Charlemagne's hand as a ruler,
for he took on many conquests as a necessity to spread the Christian religion
throughout Europe. (Ganshoff 19) Indeed, it appears that Charlemagne's desire to
spread his kingdom and government was intertwined with his desire to spread the
Christian religion and have the people live according to the Word of God. (Ganshoff
25)
At the beginning of the Carolingian dynasty the Church was suffering from many
problems. Paganistic peoples, a degradation of the Latin language, and the decline
of power of the Pope or Papacy all contributed to the need for a leader to bring
about reformation. Charles Martel, Pepin, and ultimately Charlemagne all took as
their personal responsibility the reorganization of the Church. Each one, as king

of the Franks, saw it his duty to better the state of his churches. (Ganshoff 205) Charlemagne, through the monasteries and ultimately the "Palace School", required all priests to learn classic Latin. His purpose was to insure that church services were always conducted in the proper form, with correct pronunciation and grammar. The education of the priests also served to provide Charlemagne with a growing number of educated people for his administration, and gave his kingdom a unified written language that could be passed on throughout all of Western Europe. (Holmes 97)

The Papacy had been reduced to controlling only a small portion of land around Rome, and was under constant aggression from the Lombards. Pope Hadrian I in 773 appealed to Charlemagne to help rebuff the Lombards, and in the winter of that year in a short and decisive campaign, the Lombards were defeated. Charlemagne then added "King of the Lombards" to his title, and gave control of the northern part of Italy to the Pope. The creation of the "Papal States" indebted the Pope to Charlemagne, and Pope Leo III eventually crowned Charlemagne "Emperor of the Romans" on Christmas day in 800AD. (Ganshoff 41)

Power in Carolingian society was based on land ownership, also known as Feudalism. Charlemagne knew that he must have the allegiance of the people to himself, the King. To accomplish this, he looked back to the seventh century, and instituted an oath of fidelity – a promise to do nothing that would endanger the king or his sons or the royal power. The feudal monarchy created by Charlemagne had two definite characteristics: absolute power limited only by advice given by nobles and the Church and power based on a contract - the oath of fidelity pledging allegiance by the king's subjects. (Boussard 42)

"The oath brought two immediate advantages. It created a direct, personal link between the subject and the king. But more important still, anyone who broke it became guilty not only of infidelitas but also of perjury; if his infidelity was not great enough to attract the death penalty, he could still be condemned to lose his right hand as a perjurer, and what was more, in religious terms he had placed himself in a state of mortal sin." (Ganshoff 113) The oath was a combination of action for the public good, combined with the practice of Christian virtues. Once again, an example of the minimal separation of Church and State.

Charlemagne recognized the importance of education, not only of spreading it throughout his kingdom, but also of learning for himself the ability to read and write Latin and Greek. His desire for personal knowledge, and to educate the people, lead him to found the "Palace School" at his home, Aix-La-Chapelle. To staff his school, Charlemagne turned to the monasteries. During the Dark Ages preceding the Carolingian dynasty, only the monks had maintained the ability to read and write. They had over the years, however, misprinted many of the books of the Bible. Charlemagne asked the monk, Alcuin, to head the school, and commissioned him to correct the texts that had been copied incorrectly. (Ganshof 30)

The schools begun by Charlemagne were primarily for the education of the priests, but were open to all people. Charlemagne's Admonitio generalis stressed the importance of education for everyone. Many of the scholars brought to the Palace School were foreigners: Italians, Spaniards, and Irish, but there were also some Franks. (Holmes 96-97) Charlemagne saw it his duty to create a center for science, art and literature, and to spearhead a cultural revolution in Western Europe. Charlemagne himself joined the school, attended classes, and fulfilled his scholarly duties. (Bulfinch) He was known to be fluent in speech, and able to eloquently express himself. He mastered Latin and Greek, but he could not speak Greek as well as he could understand it. Charlemagne studied grammar, rhetoric, dialects and astronomy as well. He tried to write, but since he began late in life he was not very successful. (Halsall 25) He also saw that his sons and daughters attended classes, as well as learning traditional Frankish traditions of riding and hunting for the boys, and cloth-making for the girls.

The education system used by Charlemagne's scholars was suprisingly like that of Classic Greek and Roman scholars. A text would be read by a student or teacher, accompanied by an explanation. Then there would be discussion of the material

following the proper analytical reasoning of the time. This method of teaching was responsible for generations of students learning to discipline their thoughts, and formed the minds of several leaders who lived in Charlemagne's day, and under the kings who followed.

As King or Emperor, one of Charlemagne's primary responsibilities was to regulate laws and trade within the boundaries of the Franks. He accomplished many goals that would set the stage for the growth of Medieval Europe. Charlemagne took measures aimed at stabilizing the coinage of the day, regulating the amounts of silver and gold to be contained in each. (Boussard 24) After the fifth century, coins had been minted by any number of coiners, and the value of each varied greatly.   The reforms of Pepin and Charlemagne saw to the regulation of the amount of precious metals in each coin, as well as the monogram of the king to be embossed on each. These actions gave the idea that money was publicly guaranteed and controlled by one source, instead of many. (Boussard 32)

Charlemagne also unified the laws of his kingdom based on the laws of the church. He set standards for administering justice, codified marriage and divorce laws, and gave rights to all men founded in the word of God. There were exceptions, however. People of privilege: ranking officials in the political, juridical, or religious communities were accorded special protection by the king, and had the ability to have their court cases heard in the palace court. (Ganshof 93) Outside of the palace, Counts, or the individual heads of states, conducted court to settle civil differences. Interpretation of the law was varied, as each man was able to read his own version of truth. Also, the adage "power corrupts" was prevalent in the days of Charlemagne. To combat corruption or the misinterpretation of laws, Charlemagne created the missi dominici, or royal commissioners to inspect and inquire into the judgments of the local courts. (Ganshof 93)

Charlemagne had a profound effect on the art and architecture of Western Europe. His effect was not new thought, but merely a resurgence of ancient Roman tradition. He commissioned great chapels for the monasteries, providing space to worship for many people at one time. The early constructions were mostly of wood; a material familiar to the nomadic people of the time. The need for security and longevity necessitated a return to stone construction, so the Roman style of temples, monuments, gardens and arches was resurrected. (Boussard 160)

Aesthetic decoration also played an important part of architecture during the Carolingian empire. Mosaics, gilding, marble, carvings of ivory, and paintings adorned these new, marvelous structures. Precious gems, gold, and silver were used throughout the churches. Frescos, terra-cotta, and plaster were used to provide background for the walls and pillars of churches and monuments. (Boussard 169) All of these arts were not, however, original. The people of Charlemagne's time were merely adapting Germanic habits and tradition with the rediscovery of Roman tradition, Byzantine art and oriental innovation. (Boussard 157)

Charlemagne was a enlightened leader who restored the roots of education and order Medieval Europe. His reconstruction of the power of the Pope, the growth of the monasteries - in particular those given to the education of priests and general population, and revival of art and architecture was to set the stage for the development of Western Civilization as we know it today. Laws, traditions, and teachings were carried on by the descendants of the Carolingians in their words and actions, leaving a precedent for the actions of civilization for hundreds of years to come. Charlemagne, a king wiser than any other of his time, was a determined and forceful leader who let nothing stop him once he had begun a task. (Halsall 8)

*note - One reference not cited in this text portrayed Charlemagne as a gluttonous and superstitious semiliterate with a propensity for brutality. As there were no other documentations to this effect, these opinions were not brought to light in the text. Due to the source (Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia), however, I thought it insightful to include this information at the end of the piece.

 WORKS CITED

Boussard, Jacques, The Civilisation of Charlemagne. London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1968

Bulfinch, Thomas, Bulfinch's Mythology: Legends of Charlemagne Or Romance Of The Middle Ages. 1863 [gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/53/1]

Ganshof, Francis L., The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy, Studies in Carolingian History. New York, Cornell University Press 1971

Halsall, Paul, Internet Medieval Sourcebook . [http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html]. August 1996

Holmes, George, The Oxford History of Medieval Europe. New York, Oxford University Press 1988

Charlemagne
I. Rise to power
A. Charles Martel
B. Pepin the Short
C. Carloman
II. Changes in Political and Social order
A. Shift from many Kings to Counts
1. Ownership by lineage changes to appointment by Charlemagne
2. The Oath of Fidelity p. 113 Carol. And Frank. Monarchy
B. Affiliation of the church(diocese) to newly conquered lands p. 205 Carol. And Frank. Monarchy
C. Changes from Christian/pagan adaptations to true Christian religion
III. Education
A. The need for education p.8 Carol. And Frank. monarchy
B. Alcuin p. 134 civ. Of Char.
C. Palace School / monastery
D. Importation of foreign scholars p.126 civ. of Char.
1. Methods of instruction p.130 Civ. Of Char.
2.