

Historical Overview

The Early Middle Ages (476-1050) - this was an unsettled period, often called the **Dark Ages**.

The Late Middle Ages (1050-1450) - was a more stable time where societies grew, along with agriculture and trade.

Feudalism

A hierarchical social structure, with the king as overlord, warriors or lords at different levels below him, and common people at the bottom.

Feudal Estate - the overlord watches over both warriors and common people. The warriors protect the overlord's land, while the common people are just the common household people - servants.



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The Kingdom of the Franks

Largest and most powerful kingdom of the Middle ages was established in Gaul by Clovis, leader of the Franks.

He is the founder of the French monarchy.

When he died he left the kingdom to his four sons who fought over it.

Eventually the church helped get Pepin, a Frankish noble, appointed king.

A new line of Rulers, the Carolingians.

He rewarded the church with lands near Rome, which became the Papal States.



Charlemagne

- Son of Pepin.

- He believed in being a Christian king, who had a duty to lead and protect his people and to see them safely into heaven.

- Encouraged many military campaigns.

- He invaded and conquered northern Spain, northern and southern Italy and Germany.

- His military achievements were so impressive that he was called **Charles the Great** or **Charlemagne**.

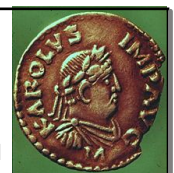


Fig. 1. - Portrait of Charlemagne, from the Bayeux Tapestry. (The Bayeux Tapestry is a long strip of woven wool, which depicts the events of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066.)

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- In AD 800, Charlemagne was crowned the *emperor of the Romans* by pope Leo III.

- His most significant activity was to bring back learning and literacy.



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- After his death in 814 AD, civil war broke out for control of his kingdom.

- In AD 843, his three grandsons signed the Treaty of Verdun which divided the empire among the three of them.

- However, this division just caused more invasions and conflicts from outsiders, which caused the break up of Charlemagne's empire.



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