

FRANKISH EMPIRE

 Franks – a Germanic tribe that entered Europe at the beginning of the 3rd century AD. In the 5th century they settled in the territory of today´s Belgium and the Netherlands. They lead the aggressive campaigns to the east and the south-west.

 The birth of the new Frankish state establishment is connected with Clovis I (481 – 511) from the Merovingian dynasty. He was a diplomat, politician who united the Franks. He succeeded in gradually gaining control over the greater part of Western Europe. He converted to Christianity together with his people. Franks as the only nation accepted the orthodox Christianity.

At the death of Clovis, his kingdom was divided territorially by his four adult sons – each son was granted a comparable portion of land: Austrasia – Reims, Neustria – Paris, Burgundy – Orleáns and Aquitaine.

Frankish Empire got into conflict with Slavs. The ruler of the Frankish Empire Dagobert I fought against the Samo's Empire. The decisive battle was the Battle of Wogatisburg (631) where the Slavs, led by Samo, defeated the Franks.

 In the 7th century the Frankish Empire started to deteriorate. The royal power weakened and the state officers – the mayors, came to the forefront. First they worked at the royal court; they were in charge of the court supplies. Their power and influence grew and soon they became the royal property administrators and gained influence in political affairs.

 Each part of the empire /Austrasia, Neustria, Burgundy/ had its own mayor. They had the real power in the state; the king was only a puppet.

 Austrasian mayor Pepin II (687 – 714) succeeded to win in the mutual battles of the mayors – he became the sole mayor of the whole kingdom. Pepin II came from the CAROLINGIAN dynasty – Carolingian era. He attempted to stabilise and expand the empire and his military campaigns were connected with Christianisation.

 His son Charles Martel (714 – 741), who was also only a mayor, ruled individually and the king submitted to him in everything. In this period formally the Merovingian had the power in their hands but the real rulers were the Carolingians. Charles Martel (the Hammer) was viewed as the uncrowned king of the west. In 732 he succeeded in defeating the southern enemies of the Frankish Empire, the Arabs, in the battle of Poitiers.

 Merovingians were over a long period of time unable to rule, which is why the son of Charles Martel Pepin III the Short (751 – 768) turned to the pope with a question whether it was right if the one who did not have the real power could rule. In 751 the pope removed the last Merovingian king Childeric III from the throne.

Pepin III became the real beginner of the royal Carolingian dynasty. The pope set off on the historically first papal journey behind the Alps, anointed the king and by this act he took him and the whole country under the protection of the Christian God. A strong bond came into existence between the pope and the Frankish kingdom that influenced the whole Middle Ages. The Papacy that was till that day more oriented on the Byzantine Empire, turned its focus on the European West represented by the Frankish Empire.

In that period of time the Longobards threatened the Papal States. Pope Stephen II asked Pepin III for help. Pepin re-conquered the territories of the Longobards and gave them to the pope as a gift to the Church, the so-called “Donation of Pepin” in 756. It became the base for the establishment of the Papal territory with the centres in Ravenna and Rome.

Upon Pepin’s death, his sons, Charles and Carloman, once again divided the kingdom between themselves. However, shortly after Carloman died leaving sole rule to his brother Charles in 771.

He becomes Rome-oriented, spreading the Christianity. In 774 he conquered the Longobards and let himself be crowned as REX FRANCORUM ET LANGOBARDORUM.

In 800, Pope Leo III (as a reward for help) crowned Charles Emperor of the Romans, by which the status of the emperor was restored after the termination of the Western Roman Empire in 476. Disputes began whether the emperor was the real emperor by his own appointment or if he needed to be crowned by the Pope. His coronation however meant separation of the Byzantine Empire from Western Europe and at the same time laid the foundation of the new formation – the Holy Roman Empire.

 The word king itself is derived from Charles´ name (Charles = king).

Charles the Great also tried to conquer the Slavic tribes but he didn't succeed (the Slavs however had to pay him peace taxes – tributes), he broke the resistance of the Saxons and connected their territories to the Frankish Empire.

Vast spreading of the Frankish Empire required a reform in administration – division into counties. Head of the county was a count, who was the deputy to the ruler. The office of the count was not hereditary; that prevented the possible resistance against the central power.

The peripheral parts of the empire, that had to face the attacks of their enemies, were administered in a different way. There the military administration had to be introduced in the form of the so called margraviates – marks. They served as defence against the attacks from the outside, but also had to ensure the expansion of the empire. They were administered by a margrave.

 To control the counts and margraves special envoys (palace inspectors) were appointed by the king.

*Carolingian renaissance*

The period of Charles´ rule is also known as Carolingian renaissance – cultural development that was directly supported by the royal court was linked to ancient patterns, attempting to enhance the level of education and spreading of Christianity.

Charles the Great supported the founding of schools next to individual bishoprics and monasteries.

The court´s seat was in Aachen. From there the education spread to other parts of the empire.

The legacy of Carolingian renaissance:

* + - * Writing: Carolingian minuscule
			* 7 liberal arts /taken over from antiquity/ fundamentals of education – liberal because they were worthy to be done by a free person
			* Art of illumination (in gospel books)

In times of its highest glory the Frankish Empire was enormous. It occupied the territory of today´s Germany, France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Austria, and northern Italy. Military affairs as well as the protection of the county demanded continuous supply of soldiers which led to introduction of compulsory military service for the unmarried citizens. Some of them wanted to avoid this obligation so they would voluntarily give up their freedom and enter the feudal relationship with their strong feudal lords and become their vassals. The power of the feudal lords grew at the expense of the sovereign power. The Frankish Empire is the birthplace of the feudal system of relationships, which became the fundament of the social relationships in the Middle Ages.

 Charles the Great died in 814. The successor to the throne becomes his son Louis the Pious. Soon it was clear that it would be impossible to keep the enormous empire as a united state – due to inner and outer problems. To prevent the arguments within the dynasty Louis tried to divide the realm between his three sons. The main ruler with the imperial title would become Lothair. After Louis´ death the other brothers refused to submit to Lothair so they solved their disputes with the so called Treaty of Verdun – in which the division of the empire into three souvereign entities was settled – western part of the river Rhine (later France) acquired by Charles the Bald – West Francia, eastern part of the river Rhine (later Germany) acquired by Louis the German – East Francia, and the oldest Lothair acquired the territory of northern Italy – Middle Francia together with the imperial title.

The united Frankish Empire split into three parts. The fights between them continued however and Lothair´s state later ceased to exist.