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Introduction

One of the questions that have been posed at the beginning of this work was: Can we consider Charlemagne the ancestor of the United Europe?

As it has already been stated Historians and politicians have had different views of the role Charlemagne might have taken in creating a United Europe. Some of these think that he was a genius in predating what would have had a definite persistence in the modern era. On the contrary, throughout the years others have asserted that politicians in particular but also historians have superimposed legends and myths on the figure of the king only to serve their need of finding a great personality who could be chosen as father of what is today the European Union. On the next pages we will take a look at different points of the Frankish king. First of all, it is essential to present the historical figure of the person whose actions have made history. Who was Charles? His historian and collaborator Einhard gave us the first and probably most trustworthy biography ever made on him because of the scarce details about his birth and early life that are in our possession. Through the biographer and the historians of the XX century we will see the most important points of his life and political action. He was a great warrior with a great tactical sense that helped him during a lifetime of wars against different populations that surrounded his kingdom. It is only thanks to his abilities that he could conquer them and create a vast dominion that occupied almost all western Europe and that left an historical mark. He was and will always be one of the most important kings of European history. The great cultural and religious reforms decided during his long reign are particularly important given that they shaped the whole political project he had in his mind. All the historical actions he undertook are going to represent the basis of the second part which will tell us about the distinguishable common elements between a creation of the XX century and its empire. The reference is obviously the European union. This

community was created so many centuries after the death of Charlemagne and it might seem strange to hear about some connections that link together those two political situations. The reality is that there is more in common than expected and these elements have been under the ideas of historians and politicians for centuries. From the Franco-German axis, through the conferences organised for the anniversary of his death and to the innovative aspects that indicate a continuum with modern politics there is a lot to analyse. Not everyone agreed with the title of *Rex Pater Europæ* he was given. Le Goff has always seen Charlemagne's political actions as completely directed toward an imitation of what was the Roman Empire and the greatness it reached at the peak of its magnificence. But was he right? Certainly, Charles has lost one of his main historians as well as one of the greatest European medievalist of the XX century. But, there are other great names that do not agree with that vision or at least that try to find a unifying point: Alessandro Barbero and Lucien Febvre. This means that there will be a third part of critical analysis with the point of view of the three. They are going to give us an idea of what modern historians think about his role of "Father of Europe". It is essential to understand what the main flow is and if it has changed throughout the years. To this purpose, it will be helpful to know a bit about the thesis of Henri Pirenne that somehow gave a new light to the emperor. For so many centuries the middle ages have been labelled as the dark Ages, especially during the Renaissance. In the XV century spread this belief that the middle ages were years of scarce cultural production where books were not copied or written. It was not true and we are going to see the great political and cultural moments of the IX century when Charlemagne ordered the copy of a vast amount of books that would have been useful in any single library but mostly in the library of his palace. His greatness covered different spheres from the political to religious and cultural ones and he will always be remembered for the signs he left to modern society.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY OF A KING

1 The Franks

In this part of this thesis we will have to admire the historical and political project of the Franks with a detailed description of their achievements, the conquests but, especially, the unification that Merovingian kings started and that Charlemagne had the chance to complete. He was able to have a political project that outdid what other kings ever tried to do. Therefore in a second moment we will analyse deeply what he had in his mind and all the cultural, economic and political steps he took.

Charlemagne has remained impressed in the European unconscious as the emperor that was crowned in Saint Peter's Basilica in the Christmas night of the year 800.

What was like to be a Frankish king in the VIII century ? First of all, the Franks were not even a population but rather a federation of tribes, Bructeri, Chattuarii and Chamavi¹, coming from the basin of the Rhine, that shared the same Germanic dialect, the same religious cults and followed the same head warrior. They finally decided to assume a collective name as a factor of identity: the term Franks meant courageous.

Among the first people who gave a description of this collection of tribes we find the roman *Gaius Sollius Sidonius Apollinaris*, a Gallo-Roman poet, diplomat and noble bishop:

«from the top of their heads their red hair descend, all drawn toward the forehead while their nape is completely shaved. Their eyes are clear and transparent, made of grey, light blue colour. Instead of a beard they wear thin moustache that they curl with a comb. Their favourite hobbies are the throwing of an axe against a target, the gyre of their shield, the surpassing of

¹ Three Germanic that existed between the 1st and the 4th century before being absorbed by the Frankish populations.

the lances that they had previously thrown. If they get surrounded by their enemies or face a hard soil situation they only succumb to death but never to fear.»²

Those barbarians conquered Gaul that was the richest and most populous region in the impoverished Occident. From the very beginning, they had displayed their will not to share it with anyone else around: the Visigoths, who had installed in the northern part of the country, in the modern Provence and Languedoc, were defeated and pushed toward the Pyrenees; the Burgundians, who were installed in the valley of the Rhône, had to recognise the superiority of the Franks and subjugate to their kings; and, it took much effort to Byzantine generals and, then, to Lombards to prevent those populations from expanding over the Alps, toward Italy.

As far as the Gallo-Romans³ are concerned, they were given the right to remain in those territories provided that they recognised the superiority of the Frankish king. But, the Franks could have never inhabit the entire Gaul because of their scarce number, they were in fact not more than two hundred thousand people. Those warrior arrived in great numbers only in the northern part of the country, along the Rhine, the Meuse and the Moselle rivers. If we move little by little to the south the Frankish become more and more sparse and it was easier for Gallo-Roman populations to absorb the conquerors, imposing their habits and their dialect from which came modern French. The Frankish kingdom of Gaul was constituted by a multitude of kingdoms; even though the different tribes that were part of it had all recognised the power of a king, the dynamic and cruel Clovis, and they even followed his conversion to Christianity toward the end of the V century, this union did not last long. The habit of subdividing the inheritance among all the male children determined the formation of different reigns. The most oriental, located between the

² A poet, diplomat and bishop who lived in the 5th century. His letters are some of the very few of Gallo-Roman aristocracy that are still in existence.

³ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, p.8.

Moselle and the Rhine, was named «the reign of the East», Austria or Austrasia; thanks to its geographical position, it could impose its authority on the populations of southern Germany, thus incorporating the dukedoms of the Thuringii, the Alemanni, the Bavarians in the zone of Frankish influence. If we moved further to the Occident, over the immense Silva Carbonaria forest that covered a part of modern Belgium, we could find the realms of Paris, Orleans and Soissons that congregated in a unique kingdom which utilised a Romance language; The Franks called it “the new realm”, Neustria. In the South-East, over the Vosges, between the Rhône and the Alps, the kingdom of Burgundy formed a separated political entity. Southernmost, Provence, where the ethnic Franks were almost absent, was still ruled by a Roman official that kept the name of patrician. By the way, he no longer followed the rules of Constantinople but was under the control of the Frankish kings. In the South-West, Aquitaine was totally out of Frankish control.

The effective power of the two most important kingdoms, Neustria and Austrasia, passed from one Mayor of the Palace to another: they were a sort of ministers, or viceroys, that governed in the place of the kings but that really wanted to substitute them. At the beginning there was a mayor of the palace in every kingdom, but in 688 the powerful Pepin, who occupied the office in Austrasia, succeeded in imposing its will even to Neustria after having defeated Neustrian magnates in war. From that moment on the Frankish population was effectively ruled by an only mayor of the palace. The family that would have later become Carolingian descended from an alliance of two big nesters of Austrasia: Pepin of Landen and Arnulf who both died in 640. After the death of Pepin of Herstal in 714 the office passed to his son Charles who was given the surname of Martel which meant small Mars due to his fame of warrior. He inherited a power that was far from being solid but he managed to reinforce it through guiding the Franks against the menace of the Muslims. In 732 Charles Martel defeated at Poitiers an Arab column that had advanced reaching the Loire. In the following years The Franks reconquered with the

sword the entire South. At his death in 741, the small Merovingian kingdom was transmitted to his sons Pepin, later called the Short, Carloman the full and uncontestable authority on a kingdom that was solidly united. In theory, there was already a king, Childeric III, but he was only a puppet and did not have any real role. When Charles Martel died a monk made a mistake registering his name with the title *rex*, something that continued even with his sons.

2 The birth of Charlemagne

Who was Einhard? The question might seem unnecessary or even pointless but it actually has a considerable relevance when talking about Charlemagne's life. In any case, this person was a courtier and was the biographer of Charlemagne and, of course, the person who wrote *Vita Karoli Magni*, the biography whose uncertain period of creation can be estimated in the years between 817 and 833.

Here we have an interesting quotation that the biographer made about the birth of the future king that we can read in *Plan of his work*, a chapter of his biography :

“It would be folly, I think, to write a word concerning Charles' birth and infancy, or even his boyhood, for nothing has ever been written on the subject, and there is no one alive now who can give information on it. Accordingly, I determined to pass that by as unknown, and to proceed at once to treat of his character, his deed, and such other facts of his life as are worth telling and setting forth, and shall first give an account of his deed at home and abroad, then of his character and pursuits, and lastly of his administration and death, omitting nothing worth knowing or necessary to know”⁴.

⁴ Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*, translated by Samuel Epes Turner, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880).

But to be honest he was not the only person who drafted such a work on the king. The Monk of Saint Gall wrote a book around 883/884, called *De Carolo Magno*, for the king Charles the Fat where he covers more subjects and materials than just writing about Charlemagne.

Charles Martel had died only a short time ago when the wife of Pepin, Bertrada of Laon, gave birth to a boy and he was baptised with the name of the grandfather. The place where the birth happened is still unknown. As we mentioned before, his biographer Einhard wrote that Charles died in the January of 814 in his seventy two year of life and in his forty two year of reign, a calculation that brings us to the year 742⁵. The *Annales Regni Francorum*⁶ date the death of Charles around the seventy one years of life and forty three years since the conquest of Italy. Even more generic is the inscription left upon Charlemagne's tomb at Aachen that says *septagenarius* which means seventy years. But the interesting thing is that none of the above mentioned testimonies worries about a detail that is fundamental for modern historians: the date of birth. As it was said previously, the only document that told us that the emperor was born on the 2nd of September 742 is the biography left by Einhard. By the way, the precise date of birth does not have so much importance as much as it did not for his contemporaries because they never kept memories of their age nor they celebrated their birthday.

⁵ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000.

⁶ The *Annales Regni Francorum* are a collection of annals describing the life of Carolingian monarchs from 741 to 829.

3 The special position

The contemporaries of Charlemagne strongly believed that the Franks descended directly from the Trojans. This legend was transcribed for the first time in the *Chronicles of Fredegar*⁷ composed in 660, but it appeared in different versions only a few years after. The Trojan origin had a specific meaning; it was useful to confront, to compete with, Rome. If Romans descended from Priam passing through Aeneas, the Franks were convinced that they derived from another Trojan prince, *Francione*, who had given them their name and that guided them inside Europe making them install in the shores of the Rhine river after long migrations. Therefore, they had a blood relation with the Romans and this authorised them to govern Gaul. This idea was certainly transmitted to Charlemagne since he was a child. The settlement of the Franks in Gaul was not the result of a mass migration of a barbarian horde, in fact already in III and IV century some Frankish warrior groups at the service of the empire had peacefully settled in these territories.

There was another important reason that permitted the Franks to present themselves as the successors of the Romans: the privileged relation with the Church of Rome. That particular alliance began with the conversion of Clovis I who was baptised in Gaul the Christmas night of an unknown year; but it could have happened in 496. The other Germanic populations were converted to Christianity by the missionaries of Greek formation and they had embraced the new religion following its Arian form that was really widespread in the Eastern Roman Empire. The difference with Catholics is that the Arians believe in a Christ that is more human than divine, inferior to the Father. On the contrary, when the Franks arrived in Gaul they were still polytheist and their conversion to Christianity happened under the supervision of the local episcopacy. Therefore, they accepted very soon the Catholic version of the

⁷ The chronicles were written in the 7th century but the attribution to Fredegar was given in the 16th century but the author remains unknown.

religion. Bishops and Gallo-Roman senators found it easier to collaborate with the Frankish kings, considering them protectors and not tyrants. But most of all, the Catholicism of Frankish kings permitted them to establish good relations with the spiritual head of the Catholic Church, the pope. The successor of St. Peter was a subject of the Roman emperor that was continuing to stay in the faraway Byzantium and the pope should have counted on the emperor to be protected from his enemies: for example, from the Longobards who had arrived in Italy in 568, and were menacing to invade Rome. For all these reasons, the popes recognised early the importance of assuring for themselves a protector that was near and familiar. In a letter written by pope Stephen II to Pepin in 756, Saint Peter himself addressed to the Franks assuring that the Creator considered them special among all the populations and that they were destined to a mission as great as that of the Romans. A few years later, pope Paul I notified his election to Pepin rather than doing it to the emperor of Orient as was the common occurrence. And the message left by Paul I, who defined the Franks as a population sent by God, was never lost and, in fact, the *Lex Salica*⁸, written in 763-64 contained a similar message in the prelude. For the child who was learning the history of his civilisation, the Franks were not an aggregation of tribes but were the descendants of the Trojans. Paul the Deacon is a direct testimony of how the future emperor saw the history of his family when he was narrating about the story of Arnulf of Metz.

4 The Pippinids

The coup d'état undertaken by Pepin was made with the help of his closest ally: the pope. Even if the bishop of Rome did not have the absolute

⁸ It is an ancient Germanic collection of laws and it represented one of the major codes in the Frankish kingdom during the Middle Ages.

power that has today, his moral and political authority was much respected and recognized by the Latin Christianity. And, when Pepin decided to write to pope Zachary before advancing his candidacy to the throne, he requested the pope the permission to do it. After having this permission, in November 751 he was crowned from the assembly of the magnates of the kingdom and was, then, anointed by the bishops of the Gauls. Meanwhile, the legitimate king was sent to a monastery. The successor of Zachary, Stephen II, when menaced by the Longobards, made the king promise to intervene in Italy. In return the pope went to Gaul to repeat the ceremony of the royal anointment in 754. This event officially sanctioned the legitimacy of the new dynasty. In the same occasion the pope gave Pepin and his sons the title of Patrician of the Romans which did not have an exact juridical meaning at that time. In a certain way, it represented a sort of confirmation that the Frankish king had become the protector of the pope. This title was traditionally given by the Byzantine emperor to the exarch⁹ of Ravenna but the city had been conquered by the Longobards. To reinforce the alliance between Pepin and Stephen it was instituted a relation of *patrinatus*¹⁰. It is not clear what made the pope turn to the king after 754 and then to Charles and Carloman but it might be possible that the successor of Peter had been their godfather. The ritual of the anointment introduced by Pepin represented an extraordinary novelty that had a symbolic value. The Frankish kings arose through acclaim and Pepin was not only the first Frankish king to introduce this sacred symbol in his coronation but also the only Christian king to do this. The anointment had the power to render the king a sacred being and to give him a sort of priestly character. This is the reason why Pepin could present himself to the public as

⁹ The exarch was an authority chosen by Constantinople that was in charge of a portion of Byzantine dominions and had vast powers at his disposal.

¹⁰ The *patrinatus* was a fundamental relationship created between the family of the baptised and the one of the godfather. Patrizia Meli, *Gabriele Malaspina, marchese di Fosdinov. Condotte, politica e diplomazia nella Lunigiana del Rinascimento*, Firenze University Press, 2009, p.60.

“the oiled of God” and that could impose his authority over his territories and the Church.

5 The warlike nature of Charlemagne

In September of 768 king Pepin died in Paris and his sons were destined to divide their father’s kingdom between themselves. At the time of deciding how to divide his territories, the dying king did not respect the ancient division of the kingdoms but preferred to create two new different blocks as his father Charles Martel did. Charles received the external part of Frankish dominions: a half moon-shaped territory that extended from the Atlantic coast of Aquitaine to the Loire and occupied part of Neustria, the majority of Austrasia finally rejoined the coast of Frisia and incorporating a great part of Germanic provinces up to Thuringia. Carloman inherited, instead, the internal block that included a small part of Austrasia, the southern Germanic provinces of Alamannia, a great part of Neustria, the southern part of Gaul and the most internal part of Aquitaine. The new block logic did help the unity of the Frankish kingdom even though there were now two kings. By the way, the relations between the two brothers were tense and this was probably due to the geopolitical results created by the division of the territories: Charlemagne had the chance to easily expand toward the pagan Germany while Carloman was facing a much more difficult situation, finding the Arabs on its Pyrenean borders and the Lombards on the Italian borders. The fact that none of the two undertook any military campaign increased the mistrust between the brothers. Thus, the division had created an unstable situation and it was necessary the intervention of their mother to keep a peaceful situation. But Carloman died in December of 771 after several months of illness. Even if he was twenty years old when he died, he had two children that were under the tutelage of their mother Gerberga and the

magnates of the kingdom. But, Charlemagne was smart enough to take advantage of the situation and, in fact, he proclaimed himself the unique king of the Franks, taking the territories of his brothers. His brother's wife and its children were forced to escape to Italy with the few bishops, abbots and counts that remained faithful. Obviously some of those religious and aristocrat figures decided to make an oath of allegiance to their new king.

A few months after the death of Carloman, Charlemagne launched his first campaign, over the Rhine, against the pagans of the north. The campaign against the Saxons undertaken in the summer of 772 was brief and apparently decisive but it was actually the first of an entire period. The Franks penetrated deeply in the territories of their enemies and imposed the authority after fighting intensely.

The relations with the Lombards had always been bad, first and foremost since the popes started requesting for protection to the Catholic kings of Gaul. In 739, Gregory III wrote to Charles Martel with a very ceremonious style, imploring the king to intervene against Liutprand that was about to menace Rome. In return the pope sent him the keys of the sepulchre of Saint Peter, as if it was a sort of nomination to protector of the Roman Church. In 754 the consecration of Pepin by pope Stephen and the concession of the title of Patrician of the Romans went hand in hand with the promise of an intervention in the peninsula. In the summer of that year Pepin besieged king Aistulf in Pavia, forcing him to renounce all the conquests the Lombards had made in central Italy and to recognise the supremacy of the Franks. Only two years later, in 756, Aistulf decided not to respect what he had previously said and started a new set of military campaigns arriving in Rome and obligating the pope to send a desperate plea to Pepin. The intervention of the Frankish king restored the status quo but after that victory its political design toward Italy had changed. The humiliated Lombard king had finally recognised the Frankish superiority and had also become a client of the Franks. The advent of Charles and Carloman did not change the situation, in fact, the Lombard

kingdom could become a precious ally for both of them. They both showed themselves keen to keep good relations with king Desiderius who succeeded king Aistulf in 756. The *Annales Regni Francorum* mentioned a mission in Italy undertaken by the Queen Bertranda in 770. There is no doubt that Carloman had very good relations with king Desiderius and this is demonstrated by the fact that, after his death, his wife, children and devotees sought refuge in Italy. But, Even Charlemagne established good relations with the Lombard king, so much so that his wedding with the daughter of Desiderius can be dated this period. The letter that pope Stephen III wrote to the two Frankish kings displaying his disdain about the alliance, was a clear sign of the political direction: they were abandoning a papal politic for a definitive coexistence with the Lombards. It is normal to wonder why Charlemagne decided to invade the Italian peninsula, but there is a reason behind this sudden change. Unfortunately, there is little knowledge about the events that happen during this brief period but we three of them are clear to historians; these happened between 771 and 772 even though historians do not know the exact order. The first⁶ is that Desiderius encouraged the Carloman's widow to claim for his child the throne of the dead king and to have him anointed by the pontiff. The Lombard king probably wanted to get someone behind him while organising a new war to occupy Rome. At the same time Charles repudiated his Lombard wife because she did not give him a son. Finally, not long after being elected pope Adrian I wrote a letter to Charles to tell him that Rome was terribly menaced by the Lombards. The few information we have about that short period show us that Charlemagne tried to keep the door open to a possible diplomatic solution until the very end. Moreover the king preferred to pursue an expansion over the pagan North. By the way the candidacy of Carloman's son was unsuccessful but it could have been if Desiderius had entered Rome and had compelled the pope to consecrate him. But, the campaign of the Lombard king came to an end at the doorstep of the Eternal City. At that moment the war between the Franks and

the Lombards could still have been avoided, in fact, even the Frankish magnates were reluctant to undertake such an endeavour. Therefore, Charles tried to come to an agreement between his ex father in law and the pope, suggesting that the last of them paid a reimburse of about four teen thousand gold coins in return to the retirement of the Lombard army from the occupied territories. The negotiation failed and when the pope insisted to have Charles starting a campaign in Italy the king made his plans.

5.1 The invasion of the Italian peninsula

The beginning of this series of campaign was marked by one problem that was not simple to solve. The passing of the Alps was more difficult than expected because there were only two Roman roads that permitted to cross the mountains to an army that had horse and luggage. The most direct way was the so called Via Francigena¹¹ that from Lion returned up to the Arc Valley, then descended around Turin down to the Susa Valley. At the way out of the valley the Lombards had recently refurbished the ancient system of fortifications that blockaded the access to the Italic valley since the late Roman Empire: it was the so called *Chiusa* system. The other roman road that permitted the descent to Italy was the Great St. Bernard Pass that was called Jupiter's Mount at that time; it was due to the presence of a temple dedicated to the divinity. Even this section was defended by a system of *chiuse* around the same area where it now stands the Fort Bard¹². The Franks had taken the Susa Valley and the Aosta Valley. As soon as he had decided the intervention in Italy, Charlemagne established to gather his army in Geneva because of the strategic possibilities that place offered. From there it was possible to take

¹¹ It was an ancient route that permitted the pilgrims to reach Rome from France.

¹² At the place of the fort built in the XIX century by the House of Savoy, here there was a 10th century castle defending the entrance of this valley. It was destroyed by Napoleon in 1800.

both the Susa valley road and the Great St. Bernard road. Charles decided to organise two different expeditions: the first should have passed through the Great St. Bernard with his uncle Bernard at the head of the army while the second, controlled by Charlemagne, passed through Mont Cenis. This is the first time that the personal strategic inclination of the king became manifested. In 773 the crossing of the Alps was almost an epic enterprise for the Franks. Einhard underlined how difficult the crossing of this area had been and how much effort it took to the Franks to surpass this inaccessible mountain range. Something that really needs to be remembered is the rapid defeat that Charlemagne inflicted to his enemy. The coetaneous reporters agreed that Charles did not attack the Lombards located on the *chiuse* face-to-face but he was able to circumvent them and they attribute the success to his abilities or to a miracle. But, what was the exact path followed by the Franks? In the lower Susa Valley there exist a track that is locally know as «the Track of the Franks» but the truth is that it is just one of the paths that constituted the *Via Francigena* in the Middle Ages. As far as the route follow by Charlemagne to circumvent the *chiuse* is concerned, the most credible version is the one of the monk of Novalesa. The monk stated that the Franks turned right to the valley of Sangone and from there, after descending to Giaveno, they went up to Avigliana arriving at the back of their enemy. Because of the surprise the Lombards withdrew and moved toward Pavia. Even Pepin besieged king Aistulf after having defeated him; but after a few days, when he obtained the restitution of the territories the pope wanted and the delivery of the hostages, he went home. And, the difference between Pepin and Charles lies here because of the choices made by the son. Charlemagne had a totally different political-strategic vision that we can define imperialistic. The Frankish king besieged Pavia for more than one year until June of 774, when Desiderius had lost all his forces and had to capitulate without conditions. As winner Charles settled the royal palace and redistributed to his warriors the treasure of his father-in-law who was forced to become a monk and was shut in the faraway

monastery of Corbie¹³. Adalgis¹⁴, who was the last hope for the Lombards, was shooed away from Verona and escaped to Constantinople, outside Italy. The Frankish king did not abolish the conquered kingdom and nor he incorporated it in his dominions; he decided that he should have kept the pre-existing structures and the administrative autonomy the Lombards had always had and he entitle himself the *Rex Longobardorum*.

Even before the capitulation of Desiderius, Charles was so certain about the result of the war that, in 774, he abandoned the siege of Pavia to go to Rome for the celebration of Easter. But the curious thing is that Charles kissed every step of the Saint Peter's stairs and this is the confirmation of how influent was to the king the sacred power of that place. Certainly the most important moments the king spent in Rome were those of the negotiations with the pope about which we have a very few details. What historians know is that the two renewed the friendship agreement signed twenty years earlier between Pepin and Stephen II. Moreover, Adrian asked Charles to reconfirm a written promise that his father had signed in that occasion. This document extended the territories that the Roman Church controlled, the so called «Saint Peter's Republic», recognising the pope his sovereignty over a great part of Italy; to the Franks it left a part of the Alpine area and a part of the Po valley up to Pavia. Historians are a bit doubtful about this version of the story because it is unlikely that the king might have accepted such an onerous treaty. By the way he never respected this commitment because it would have meant the dissolution of his new kingdom. Therefore, the authority of the pope was recognised only in the ancient duchy of Rome, with the addition of the Sabina, and over the Byzantine territories of the Exarchate and of the Duchy of the Pentapolis.

It is undeniable that a lot of dukes had participated to the defence of the city with very little enthusiasm and that most of them subjugated with ease to the

¹³ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, p. 35.

¹⁴ Adalgis was a Lombard king who reigned with his father from 759 to 774.

new master. This is what explains the relatively easiness of the conquest. Among the aristocratic Lombards the dissent was high and it increased with the election of Desiderius in 756 because one of his rivals, the duke of Friuli, lived this situation as an offense. This is a clear sign of the crack among the Italic magnates and Hrodgaud of Friuli started very soon to organise an upheaval. The only reason why they stood watching helplessly to the defeat of Desiderius is that they had not understood what the action of Charlemagne would have involved; this would have meant the end of the Lombard independency. In the autumn of 775, while returning from an expedition against the Saxons, Charles received a letter from pope Adrian who informed him that Hrodgaud had a meeting with the duke of Benevento, Arechis II, and was preparing an insurrection for the following Spring. But, the Frankish king reacted readily and decided to move toward the feet of the Alps and as soon as the weather permitted he crossed the mountains and placed his army in Friuli between February and March of 776. The result of the fight is not clear because it has been narrated in very different ways throughout the centuries depending if the reporter was Frankish or Lombard. According to the *Annales Regni Francorum* Hrodgaud died during the battle and Charles reconquered all the rebellious cities imposing Frankish counts instead of Lombard dukes. On the contrary, the Lombard reporter Andrea da Bergamo, after a century, wrote that the disobedient dukes confronted the Franks around the area of the Livenza river and were even able to stop their advance. According to the same person, Charles signed a document in which he accepted to leave the dukes at their place. This second version should not be taken too seriously and it appears to be the story of a hurt Lombard man who could not accept the defeat. Nowadays historians, or at least the majority of them, agree with what is written on the Frankish Annales and believe that Charles started to distrust the Lombard dukes only after their upheaval. A new situation came when the king decided to substitute the dukes with Frankish and Alemanni bishops,

counts, vassals and this was the beginning of a drastic renovation of the Italic aristocracy¹⁵.

5.2 The governance of the new territories: *Capitulare Italicum*

This is a perfect example of how the king legislated in his territories and in particular it shows the different political situation of the Italian peninsula.

Charlemagne had certainly been frightened but the upheaval of the dukes and decided that he had to obtain the faith of the populations living in these territories. The conquest of the Lombardic Italy had had serious consequences, in fact, it had caused devastation, poverty and hunger. Even pope Adrian wrote a letter to the king to denounce the tragic consequences of the war with the Lombards: there was an increase of the Christian slave trade who were sold by their Lombardic owners to Greek merchants in order to escape hunger; they even embarked themselves or their family to save their lives. In February of 776, Charlemagne promulgated his first *Capitulare Italicum*¹⁶, before confronting the rebels. The king had been informed that where his army passed people started selling themselves, their children or partners as slaves, that hungry people were forced to sell their properties to the Catholic church and that others had to sell their lands. With those laws the king ordered that all those alienations were abolished and the related acts destroyed if proven that the seller had no other alternative, that all had to be verified by a court in order to establish the equity; and, finally that all the people who sold themselves had to be released and that the donations to the Catholic church

¹⁵ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, pp. 37-39.

¹⁶ The *Capitulare Italicum* was a collection of laws emanated by the Carolingian kings for the Italic Kingdom. Its origin comes from the series of laws that Pepin the Short made only for the Italian peninsula in the VIII century.

were suspended until the situation was clearer. We have to understand that those who took advantage of the poverty of the peasants were the Lombardic nesters, both laic and ecclesiastic, and that the *Capitulare Italicum* can be seen as a sort of attack directed against the interests of the Lombards. This document represent a total new path for the political situation of the peninsula because it was a way to gain the respect and faith of the common people and this would have been the political line followed by Charlemagne. To the masses of Lombards was transmitted the message that they had the same importance as Frankish people and this implied having the same rights and the same obligations.

The will to keep the autonomy of the Lombardic kingdom was confirmed during the Easter of 781 when the son of Charlemagne, Carloman, was baptised in Rome with the new name of Pepin and became the king of the Lombards. From now on there would have been two different kings, the father who spent most of the time over the Alps, and the son who would have settled his court in Pavia. It is clear that the government of the italic territories was ruled by Charlemagne through a series of man faithful to the king because Pepin was only 4 years old: one of them was the abbot Waldo of Reichenau. When the young king grew and became able to take decisions, he started controlling the army, composed by Lombardic men, by himself and guided it during the Battle against the Caucasian Avars in 796, during the punitive expeditions against the duchy of Benevento and even in the long war against the Byzantines on the Oriental border that ended with the conquest of Venice in 810¹⁷.

Despite the increasing number of Frankish bishops, abbots and count that were utilised in the management of the kingdom, the government was still conserving most of the traditional features of the ancient Lobardic areas. An example of this was the continuous use of local officials together with the imported Frankish and Alamanni counts. In the peripheral areas of the Italic

¹⁷ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, p. 41.

dominions the government was given to the dukes as the Lombardic tradition worked. But, as we mentioned before, Charlemagne was continuing his policy of substitution of Lombardic personnel with the Frankish one. Another characteristic of the autonomy that should have been kept untouched was the frequent publication of different *Capitulari* by Charles or Pepin which were directed to Italy.

An interesting thing to mention is the amount of legends and stories that were written on the figure of Charlemagne. The war against the Lombards left a profound impression on the collective memory thus leaving some space to the circulation of creative short stories. The siege of Pavia inspired a writer to compose one of the most brilliant and remarkable descriptions of the king several years after his death. The author was called Notker, a monk of St. Gall, who composed the *Gesta Karoli Magni* around 886-887 and dedicated them to the emperor Charles the Fat. It was a collection of invented and true stories.

5.3 The wars against the pagans: Saxons, Arabs and Avars

After defeating the Lombards Charlemagne became the only Occidental Christian king. The small Anglo-Saxon and Spanish kings did not have more than a local power. All around his territories Charles had only enemies of God: the pagan Saxons in the boundless forests of northern Germany, the pagan Danes and Slavs a little further on, the Muslim Arabs, who had already been defeated by Charles Martel, over the Pyrenees, and finally the cruel Caucasian Avars, who derived from the Attila's Huns, in the orient. The Franks were a warlike population and that was the way through which Charles Martel and Pepin obtained respect and consensus. But there is one detail that characterises the wars where Charles is involved, that is the religious element. The war was a permanent feature of his reign but the hardest one, was that against the Saxons because it had a lot of consequences.

Moreover, it lasted more than twenty years but permitted the borders of Christianity to expand up to the Elbe river, incorporating the entire Germanic territories in the Frankish kingdom. In 772 Charlemagne reunited his army and guided them against the pagans of the North obtaining an important victory and the destruction of the most essential sanctuaries of the Saxons: the Irminsul¹⁸. But, the following years showed that the punitive expeditions had to be continuous because the Saxons resisted to a submission that would have implied not only the loss of the tribal independence but also the abandonment of their religious credo. It was the insecurity of the borders with the Barbarians that made the Franks decide to undertake a military campaign against them. But it is clear that the religious and political elements went hand in hand. Among the conditions imposed by Pepin to the defeated Saxons, there was the guarantee that Anglo-Saxon and Frankish members of the clergy could conduct their activities without facing any obstacle.

The Saxons sacrificed their prisoners to their gods while the Franks killed anyone who refused to get baptised. More than once the Saxon heads wanted peace because they were powerless and destroyed by the war, up to a point that they accepted to be baptised, but anytime the Charlemagne was out of that area the upheavals burst again. In 778 the Saxons appeared Rhine and it was hard for local commanders to stop their advance. During these rebellions there appeared an important figure that was the only unitary head recognised by all the tribes of Saxons: prince Widukind. It was him who organised and started a great rebellion, exterminating the Frankish forces on the Stüntel mountains in 782. A response of the king should have been expected and, in fact, it came as one of the cruellest actions ever undertaken by the king: he intervened with his army and forced the rebels to capitulate and pretended that they consigned their weapons with the exception of Widukind who escaped to Denmark; then he ordered the execution of four thousand soldiers in Verden an der Aller. The king took the inspiration of the massacre from the bible; he loved comparing

¹⁸ According to a Saxon's belief, the sacred tree that stood there bore the sky and the stars.

himself to David who killed most of the Moabites after defeating them. After 782 Charlemagne conducted the war in a very cruel way, spending the winter in the enemy's territories and destroying the harvests in order to starve the populations. At the same time he published one of the most ferocious collection of laws of his entire reign: the *Capitulare de partibus Saxonie* which imposed the capital punishment to anyone who offended the Christian religion and its ministers. But, the edict was so ruthless that even the entourage of the king, Alcuin included, manifested their disapproval. The policy of terror seemed to be rewarding the king, in fact, in 785 Widukind was forced to come to an agreement and went to the palace of Attigny, in France, to be baptised. Even pope Adrian was so happy that ordered a celebration in any church. Unfortunately, the things were completely different because that action provoked a new rebellion of northern Saxony masses who burned churches and massacred the ecclesiastics in 793 . Charlemagne was cruel as usual deciding to take more drastic actions and, in fact instead of just devastating the rebellious village and starving its population, he opted for the mass deportation and the repopulation of those areas with Frankish and Slavic settlers. At the same time he decided to intensify the contacts with the principal members of the Saxon aristocracy and tried to collaborate with it during a council in Aachen in 797. In that occasion the members of the assembly emanated a new version of the *Capitulare Saxonicum*. This kind of new policy adopted by the future emperor bore fruits and it permitted to have a long lasting collaboration with Saxon nobles. A confirmation of this new agreement was the construction of Paderborn city where Charles placed his palace and received pope Leo III who was escaping from Rome in 799. From the city started one of the most successful Catholic missions ever organised which was able to convert efficaciously a great number of Saxons who left paganism to embrace the new religion. All the periods of wars had never had

the same results on those populations. The borders of northern Germany were now safe and closed but a different one remain open: the *Drang nach Osten*¹⁹.

Towards the Arabs in Spain, Charlemagne kept a defensive behaviour for the majority of his reign. Narbonne and Toulouse were two ancient roman cities that saw their defence systems reinforced in order to guarantee the safety of Aquitaine against eventual incursions or upheavals of its habitants. In the spring of 778 Charlemagne had an occasion to prepare an offensive intervention due to the internal fights in the Muslim dominions. Therefore, he decided to organise an expedition that passed the Pyrenees to help the governor of Barcelona, Sulayman ibn Yaqzan al-Arabi, and other *principes Sarracenorum* who rebelled against the emir of Córdoba. Those personalities went to Paderborn to request Frankish help. One of the things that permitted the expedition to exist was the hope of a rapid victory against the infidels. At the same time, the public opinion was referring to the Christians of Spain as a sort of population imprisoned by the yoke of the Saracens and told that it was their coreligionists who wanted the help of the Frankish king. In order to cross the Pyrenees he organised a pincer movement: he would personally have conducted part of his army through the Christian and subjugated Basque Country while a second army passed through the oriental hills. The troops recruited in Neustria and Aquitaine gathered on the Atlantic side while those recruited in Austrasia, Provence, Germany and Italy were sent to the Mediterranean side. The two different armies gathered under the walls of Zaragoza and when the governor of the city refused to give it to the invading enemy, Charles besieged it. Unfortunately the action was a total failure and the army was forced to return home after a month of siege. The 15th August 778 the rearguard of the retiring army was attacked and exterminated by the

¹⁹ It is an expression created in the XIX century to indicate the movements of Germanic populations and the German expansionism toward Oriental Europe. In particular, it indicates the expansion toward the areas controlled by the Slavs and the Balts.

Basque tribes of the mountains. As Einhard recounted, some important men like Hruodland and Anslem were lost during this fight.

We have to discuss a bit about one of the two people just mentioned because of his literary and historical importance. Hruodland, or Roland as we know him, was destined to become one of the most relevant and known heroes of the Occident. He was the protagonist of the *Chanson de Roland*²⁰, the person who died in the Battle of Roncevaux Pass. But, he was also the Roland of Boiardo and Ariosto, the protagonist of some of the major masterpieces of Italian, French and Spanish literature. By the way, it is not certain that Roland died during that battle because some of the most important manuscripts of the *Vita Karoli* do not even mention his name. Moreover, as far as Roncevaux is concerned, the XI century *Chanson de Roland* is the first text that identifies the place of the battle with this crossing place.

Even if the episode of Roncevaux forces us to think of the Spanish expedition as a failure, the final analysis was not totally negative. First of all, the Christian populations living close to the Pyrenees had started identifying Charlemagne as the only protector and second, the king had learnt that it was always necessary to organise better any possible expansion toward the Spanish borders. The first step of this new direction was the constitution of an autonomous kingdom of Aquitaine whose king became Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious in 781. The frequently rebellious Aquitanian populations were pacified thanks to this recognition of their independence; even if, this area was effectively controlled by Charles's counsellors.

The Christian populations of the Iberian peninsula desperately wanted the king to help them against the Muslims. They were truly dangerous as when an incursion coming from Spain arrived at the feet of the walls of Narbonne and Carcassonne in 793. In that occasion the army of William of Gellone, which tried to intercept its enemy, was defeat and the enemy went home with a

²⁰ The famous *Chanson de Roland* was written between 1040 and 1115 and tells the story of the Battle of Roncevaux which happened in 778.

conspicuous richness and slaves. In 797, after the death of the Emir of Córdoba his brother Abdallah went to Aachen to request the support of the king in order to oust his nephew; meanwhile another rebel took Barcelona and offered it to the Franks. Then, Charlemagne ordered to his son Louis to pass the Pyrenees and besiege Huesca, and to Borrell of Osona to occupy the fortified city of Vic²¹. From now on, the king of Aquitaine was big and strong enough to organise the military operations. In 800 he went to Spain again and conquered Lleida. In 801, after seven months of siege, Barcelona was taken. In the following years Louis showed his military abilities and expanded his dominions in the Iberian peninsula up to 810 when the Emir of Córdoba accepted to negotiate a peace agreement. With this document he recognised the Frankish expansions over all the territories located in the north of the Ebro river. This area taken from the Muslims was incorporated into the empire and was run as a *marca*²². The so called *Marca Hispanica*²³ has always been traditionally considered more European than the rest of the Iberian peninsula. It is time to make some military considerations about the wars with the Arabs and the way they conducted them. First of all, they always tried to avoid the battles on an open field because they relied mostly on the defensive walls of their cities and because the Frankish army was too strong to be confronted face to face.

It is now time to move to another population that confronted the king: The Caucasian Avars. According to Einhard the battle with the Avars was one of the most important ever conducted by Charlemagne. But we have to define what the Avars were now because we do not have a lot of details about this population. To be more precise the Avars were not a population but rather a horde of nomads of the steppe, raiders, horses breeders who were not too

²¹ Three Spanish cities located close to the boundary with France.

²² A march in English.

²³ A defensive area between the Umayyad Moors of Al-Andalus, the Duchy of Gascony, the Duchy of Aquitaine and the Frankish Kingdom created by Charlemagne in 795.

much different from the Huns both for the habits and for the Asiatic look; in fact, the official sources called them Huns but it is very likely that some huns were part of the horde. The khagan²⁴ was the head of the of this collection of nomads and with his help the Avars attacked the Byzantine Empire and settled themselves in the vast Danubian plane which were just left by the Lombards that were moving to Italy. By settling those areas they incorporated Bulgarians, Gepids and Slavic tribes. Thus, the khaganate was a heterogeneous reality from the linguistic and ethnic point of view. At the time of Charlemagne the majority of his inhabitants had abandoned nomadism to embrace a sedentary life: they became peasants and breeders. The modern archaeology suggests that other Asian nomadic groups joined the Avar nobles and it is very likely that among the notables the languages spoken were those of the Turkish family. As it has been said before, the Avars were not a community but a collection of populations that followed the khagan. But, if this is what modern historians know about them it might be normal to wonder what the king knew of these Avars. It is very likely that he related them to the nomads of the steppe, the Shiites or the Huns, thus giving them the same qualities he saw in those tribes: savage, cruel, bloodthirsty, ransacking lover, able of anything and last but not least, pagan. The khaganate was a recognised power that organised diplomatic relations with the Christian world: Paul the Deacon recounted that some centuries earlier the khagan had sent ambassadors to Italy and Gaul. Back then it was not known that the Avars had relations with the Byzantine Empire. Therefore, they were not an horde of people that came from the mountains to destroy everything, as they were depicted but it was a kingdom that was able to develop relations with other different populations.

²⁴ Cakanus in a Latin form. It was the title give to the heads of Turkic and Mongolians populations and it is equal to the European title of Emperor. The empire was called Khaganate.

The Bavarians were the Germanic population that lived on the Danubian plane near the borders with the Avars. Tassilo III²⁵, duke of Bavaria, had sworn allegiance to Pepin and then to Charlemagne but he had also tried to be an ally of Desiderius. After losing the support of the Lombards, the duke realised that he could not pursue an independent policy anymore but, nonetheless, he did not miss any chance to provoke the king until he was forced to take drastic actions. What really happened between the two is not really clear to the historians but it is certain that their relations were really bad in 787; in fact, the duke sent some ambassadors to Rome to request a mediation from the pope, when the king was already in that city. Obviously, the pope was not happy about the request and told the duke that he had to follow the rules of Charlemagne. When the king went home he wrote a letter to the duke imposing him to respect the pope's orders and to go to his court. The duke did not obey and this fact offered Charles the pretext to accuse Tassilo of infidelity and enter his territories with an army blessed by pope Adrian. Three armies were organised in view of the war but the fight was avoided at the very last moment because of the duke's acceptance of submission to the king and the because he even gave some hostages. The following year the duke was accused by his own bishops and vassals at the assembly held in Ingelheim. According to them he had betrayed the promise he made to the king and had made some agreements with the Avars to attack the Franks. We have a very few details to determine whether that was a farce organised to eliminate Tassilo from the scene or if he really had contacts with the Avars. In any case, the khagan might have wanted to attack in the very moment Tassilo needed his help and Charlemagne seized the day to solve the situation the way he wished. The duke was condemned to die by the assembly with the accuses of betrayal and desertion but the king did need his death and managed to have him closed in a monastery. Meanwhile Avar hordes were moving toward the borders of Bavaria and Friuli. Fortunately local commanders were could stop the advance

²⁵ He was the last duke of the Agilolfings family and he remained in place from 748 to 788.

of the enemy with the few armies they had at their disposal even if the Avar army that entered Italy arrived up to Verona where it burned the Basilica of San Zeno. Now that the Bavarian duchy had lost its autonomy and was incorporated in the Frankish kingdom there was a new need that Charlemagne had to solve. He had to gain the fidelity of the Bavarians. Alcuin affirmed that was preparing the war against the Avars already in 789 but that he was stopped by the arrival of an ambassador of the khagan. The aim of the khagan was to divide the borders with the king but Charlemagne perfectly knew that he was in a stronger position and presented only two alternatives, the war or a humiliating modification of the borders. Obviously, the khagan could not accept that. For more than a century the border between the Avars and the Bavarians was located along the Enns river and the Avars had always be willing to defend that “line”. When the khagan sent some ambassadors to Charles to understand what his intentions were, in 781, he was already placing some troops close to the Enns only to give a demonstration of their abilities. If the khagan had retreated this would have meant for the Franks the possibility to extend their borders and to make their populations penetrate into the new areas. In 791 the king gathered his army in Bavaria after the failure of the negotiations.

The Avar chevaliers were really famous among the Christians but it seems that it was a fame belonging to an earlier past because the war was lost very rapidly. The army was gathered in Regensburg in the summer of 791 and it was probably the biggest ever organised by Charles; It included Saxon, Frisian, Frankish, Thuringian and Bavarian contingents. Given that the Danube was the natural access to the territories of the Avars. The king decided to divide the army in two different parts, thus having a troop on each side of the river: the troop in the north was controlled by count Theodoricus and the treasurer Meginfrid, while the troop in the south was guided by the king. At the same time, there was a troop that would have attacked the Avars on their back and this was controlled by the Charlemagne’s son, Pepin. The problem of

the attack was the Danube itself because it was really hard to pass from one side to the other and this is the reason why there were some boats with the army. Before entering the enemy's territories there happened a curious fact which helps us understand how religious the king was. The religious ministers imposed a fasting and prayer of three days to the army in order to get God's favour. In a letter to his wife Fastrada²⁶ the king told her that it was possible to obtain the permission to drink some wine by offering a handout, even though the prohibition of meat was directed to anyone.

The king was busy to solve the skirmishes between the Bavarian nobles and this is the reason why the army spent more time than expected in Lorsch and entered the village of the enemy only in September. Meanwhile, Pepin gave good news when he conquered an Avar fortress on the borders. The Avar population escaped when the Frankish army arrived and instead of fighting they preferred to leave scorched earth behind them; they escaped toward fortified places where they could be safe. Unfortunately, when Charlemagne arrived at the Raba river he realised that the provisions were truly scarce and that even the animals started to die. The king decided to go home. This campaign of 791 was not as successful as the king had expected but it was clear that the Avars were not able to defend themselves against the Franks. The king remained two years in Bavaria up to 793 in order to organise his new attack. The boats carrying food were not sufficient to the enterprise and Charles realised that he had to prepare something different. This is why he opted for a boat bridge that could be dismantled. He was even informed about the opportunity to create a navigable canal linking the Rhine and the Danube: the so called *Fossa Carolina*²⁷. The works were really difficult because of the conditions of the soil and the canal was never used. The attack that took place in Pannonia in 791 had its consequences. First of all, the authority of the khagan started shaking and a lot of Avar heads undertook an independent

²⁶ She was the third wife of the king.

²⁷ The canal created by Charlemagne was originally long around three kilometres but today only five hundred meters remain of it.

policy. In 795 the *tudun*²⁸ sent an ambassador to Charles showing his intention of subjugating himself to the king and of converting to Christianity. The following year the khaganate collapsed, the khagan was assassinated and the duke of Friuli, Erich, organised an expedition to the Avar capital. Pepin took advantage of this situation and invaded the country with his army while the new khagan subjugated to him. It was in that occasion that the *tudun* went to Aachen to get baptised.

The Avars were famous for the vast quantity of gold they possessed which was taken by the king and then redistributed among the counts, bishops and abbots. Another part of this gold was given to the construction of the palace in Aachen and to the pope²⁹.

The khaganate was not included in the Frankish kingdom and Charlemagne could not use the title of khagan. The borders on the Enns were moved toward the orient and up to the Danube the government was left to the *tudun* who was now a Frankish vassal. Those who escaped went to Bulgaria where an insurrection was stopped a few years after. In 799 two Charles's spokespeople of the oriental borders were assassinated and the *tudun* guided a revolt against the Franks that was slowly torn to pieces. In 802 two important count were killed during a war with the Avars and this is a demonstration of how long the conflict lasted. The king took a new decision and went to Bavaria because he had to organise a new expedition that had to be sent to the Danubian territories to solve the Avar issue. When they returned to their homes they brought with them some slaves one of whom was the *tudun* who was then forgiven by the king. The repression of the uprising put an end to the military abilities of the Avars and in 805 a prince went to Charlemagne to request the possibility of having the authority over the Avar population, something that the king allowed. In return he had to accept to be baptised. Finally, a new khaganate

²⁸ An ancient Turkish noble title.

²⁹ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, pp. 67-78.

was constituted on the occidental part of their ancient country but it did not last long because it had completely lost its power.

Thanks to the conquest to the detriment of the Lombards, the Saxons, the Arabs and the Avars the territories the king controlled expanded significantly and became bigger than the original Frankish kingdom. It now included the whole modern France, Belgium, Holland, Spain, Switzerland and Austria, Germany up to the Elbe river, northern central Italy, Istria Bohemia, Slovenia, Hungary up to the Danube and finally Pyrenean Spain up to the Ebro.

6 The relation with the Roman Church: what brought to the coronation of Charlemagne in Rome

With the exception of a few areas it is possible to say that Charlemagne ruled almost over the whole Latin Christianity. Even in areas traditionally controlled by the Byzantine Empire the fame reached by the king made people address him when they needed protection. If Charles was the new Constantine, as pope Adrian called him before the final battle against the Lombards, it was right that he wore the title and the crown. The Occident could now have another emperor who prayed following the Latin ritual, created the laws and wrote its letters in Latin. There existed two different figures that wanted to be the defenders and heads of Christianity, even if the *basileus*³⁰ descended directly from Constantine. Through the years the different views of Latin and Greek had increased their distance up to a point that the belonging to a unique religion was doubtful. The religion was one and therefore there should have been a unique emperor to guide Christianity.

The alliance between the Roman Church and the Franks is strictly related to the continuous disaffection the pope had toward the Oriental emperor and he was really unhappy when the *basileus* intervened in theological controversies. The skirmishes were even directed against the figure of the emperor in fact the popes started refusing to recognise the authority of the emperor. The problem of iconoclasm contributed to worsen the situation, when in 726 the emperor of Constantinople fought the cult of the pictures. This infuriated the Roman Church and between the two churches the relation became frozen. It was during the reigns of the Byzantine emperors Leo III and Constantine V that the persecution of the images reached its peak. At the same time, the Italian situation was going from bad to worse for the pope due to the Lombards who attacked Byzantine dominions in Italy. The pope needed protection and that is

³⁰ The title of *basileus* was give mostly to the Byzantine emperors but it was originally given to Greek kings.

why he went to the Franks. Already in 739 pope Gregory III had tried to woo Charles Martel but it did not work and this is a sign of the new papal policy: from now on the election of the pope was no longer communicated to the emperor. By recognising the royal title to Pepin and by going to Gaul to anoint him Stephen II was declaring the papal independence from the Byzantine Empire. The new friendship between the new dynasty and the papacy became the fundamental axis of the European policy. Pope Adrian stopped dating his official documents counting from the *basileus*'s years of reign and abolished the image of the emperor on the coins. But, it is essential to remember that the pope was just pursuing a certain policy at that time and when the empress Irene put an end to the persecution of the images the pope welcomed her the same way he did with the Frankish king. The break with Byzantium and the subordination to Aachen had an acceleration in 795 with the election of pope Leo III. Given that he had a bad reputation, he needed the support of the Frankish king and so he sent him the report of his election, the keys of St. Peter and the standard of Rome. From now on the papal documents were dated from the years of Charlemagne's Italian kingdom. The event that more than anything destroyed definitively the relation between Rome and Constantinople was the ousting of the oriental emperor by the empress Irene, who even assumed the title of *basileus* in 797. Leo III took advantage of the situation and realised that a coronation in Rome would have moved the balance of power from East to West. The pope even ordered a series of mosaics in preparation to the event that had to be placed in a hall of the Lateran Palace. At this point we should consider even the conflict between Charlemagne and Byzantium and the actions he undertook in order to get closer to the figure of the pope. The relations the king had with Constantinople were good at the beginning and he accepted even the request from the empress Irene to marry his daughter Rotrude with the empress's son Constantine VI. But, in the spring 787 the king did not let his daughter go with the Byzantine ambassador. In winter the king had undertaken a campaign in southern Italy, close to the

Byzantine areas in the peninsula. Given that Irene did not want the Franks to strengthen their powers in Italy and given what happened with his son's marriage, the empress offered her support to Arechis II³¹, duke of Benevento. It was not only the difficult political situation in Italy that made the king reject the marriage and risk a war, but also the religious actions taken by the empress. In 787 she influenced the Second Council of Nicaea to restore the cult of the sacred images. Charlemagne was not so happy about what happened at the council because he did not understand well due to its bad knowledge of the Greek and because the council was directed by the empress. Therefore, the king ordered the rebuttal of the thesis decided during the council and the result was an extraordinary work: the *Libri Carolini*. A reunion of bishops in Frankfurt rejected the thesis because of the presence of a woman and due to strange accusations they made toward the Byzantine kings. The Frankish king was presenting himself to the world as the only guide of the Christian population. Through the writings of Alcuin we know that the papacy was risking a huge loss of influence under the reign of Leo III and that situation made people think of Christianity as a sort of empire whose emperor should have been Charlemagne. Alcuin and other people at the service of the king started referring to him as the new David, a title already used by pope Stephen II to name king Pepin. After what happened in Constantinople with the empress Irene, it was the right moment for Charlemagne to accept the imperial dignity and Charlemagne took some steps toward this direction. The historians have called this escalation to the imperial level *Imitatio Imperii*. One of his first steps toward this direction was the construction of a magnificent palace in Aachen under the supervision of the Architect Odo of Metz. Certainly, the most important part of this palace was the Palatine Chapel³² whose construction was inspired by the *Chrysotriclinos*³³ and the

³¹ Arechis II was duke of Benevento from 758 to 787 and he tried to expand his influence on former Byzantine territories while defending his duchy from the Franks.

³² It is the only part of Charlemagne's Palace that still exists today, even though it has been incorporated into the cathedral of Aachen.

church of San Vitale in Ravenna. But the king introduced a difference from the original project of the palace in Constantinople: he wanted his throne to be placed in the occidental area while the emperors of Byzantium had it on the oriental part at the place of the altar. This was a clear sign of the distances that the king was taking from the oriental emperors in order to place himself on a new position.

We have already seen that the election of Leo III in 795 meant a new meaning for the figure of the king who was now receiving some imperial connotations. In 799 the pope faced a huge problem in Rome: the two grandsons of the former pope Adrian I captured the new pope and tried to deprive him of his eyes and his tongue³⁴. But the pope was able to escape and reached Paderborn through the help of Winiges³⁵, the duke of Spoleto. But the grandsons sent a delegation to Paderborn to inform the king about the accusations of fornication and perjury of which the pope was responsible. Charlemagne, whose judgment on the situation was requested, consulted Alcuin to know if the king of the Franks could have been superior to the pope and to the oriental emperor in that situation. The king ordered an inquiry on the accusations made. It was a difficult moment for the pope who was suggested that he left his role; but he did not and remained in his position until Charles sent him to Rome accompanied by the commissioners of the inquiry. We do not know the decision taken by the court of inquiry but we can have an idea due to a comment of Alcuin³⁶. Certainly, Charlemagne wanted to acquit Leo III and put him on his throne in St. Peter but he had to do it himself in order to succeed. This is the reason why he went to Rome the 23 November 800. On the 1 December he personally opened the council that had to judge the pope

³³ It was the ceremonial hall of the lost Great Palace of Constantinople. Built in the VI century it fell into decay through the centuries until the beginning of the XIV century when the information about the palace disappeared.

³⁴ It was a custom in the Byzantine Empire when someone wanted to eliminate an adversary without being guilty of his death.

³⁵ Winiges was one of the main helpers of the Franks in the conquests at the expense of the Byzantine Empire. He ruled from 789 to 822.

³⁶ The comment was written on a letter that he sent in response to the archbishop who communicated him the result of the inquiry. The comment was "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone".

inside the Vatican Basilica. As he had organised, the council confirmed the king's will, confirming that no one could judge the figure of the pope and that he could clear his sins by pledging on the gospel about his innocence.

According to a contemporary reporter it was the same council that decided to coronate Charles due to the lack of an oriental emperor. To be honest, the decision may have been taken a few months earlier but it is all theory. By the way, the Christmas night of the year 800 Leo III placed a crown on the head of Charles, following the classical ritual, and anointed him with the sacred oil. The Roman population, represented by the Vatican clergy welcomed the figure of Charlemagne as emperor and August. Leo III started mentioning the name of the emperor on the official documents and even impressed his name on the coins of the Vatican; it was an official recognition of the emperor's sovereignty over the Eternal City. But at the same time, the fact that it was the pope who put a crown on the head of Charlemagne had a political implication. The emperor was a bit unhappy to have knelt in front of the pope thus causing an ambiguity on the relation between the church and the Frankish kings that would have lasted so many years. Even if the coronation had a certain ambiguous form, it was the emperor who had gained the supremacy over the Latin Church and the pope himself. The king could now designate the new bishops and abbots, control their behaviours and create councils when he wanted to.

The coronation of the emperor was not happily accepted by the empress Irene even though Charlemagne made its best not to create a conflict with the other empire and the same did her. A peaceful relation was kept even when the empress lost her throne through a coup d'état made by one of the ministers; in fact, the following leader tried to maintain a peace between the two empires³⁷.

³⁷ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, pp. 80-112.

7 The management of the Frankish territories: Spring Assembly, count and *missus dominicus*

One of the most interesting things about the reign of Charlemagne was the way through which he ruled his vast territories, both those inherited at the death of his father and those conquered after all the battles the king undertook during the course of his life. It is necessary to see what political institutions he inherited and maintained and what are the new ones that entered the administrative structure. An important question that will find the answer is: is there anything new that still persists in modern Europe? The aim is to give a very brief overview of the policies of the emperor.

The Spring assembly was one of the most characteristic institutions of the Frankish king's reign. It reunited around the king a multitude of free people that helped him take decisions and listened to the king's admonitions. Here lies one important detail that differentiates Charlemagne from an absolute monarch: the king did not have to be accountable only to God but also to his population and this is the original function of the Spring assembly. From one side, the new relation the king had with God made the exposure of his conduct to the population less acceptable and this is why the functions of the assembly were emptied. The population and the royal family could find a certain union and harmony through this assembly and the decisions taken by the king could find the collective approval. King Childebert II felt the need to have the deliberations of the assembly transcribed on paper: a clear symbol that the reunion was becoming less focused on the military field and more on the political one. But at the time of Charlemagne there occurred some changes on the nature of the assembly. First of all, the assembly was no longer held in March but at a later date and second, the participation to the reunion was not opened to all the Franks as it used to be but only to ecclesiastical magnates,

laymen, bishops, abbots and counts. Moreover, everyone was accompanied by his follower. Another thing that Charlemagne introduces was the new calendar of the gathering which was doubled now. The two councils took place in may and in autumn and in the second case, the king reunited only those people whom he had to talk with.

In 803 he had added a few things on the national laws due to the new territorial annexations and he believed that the approval of the assembly was not sufficient to legitimate an intervention that would have modified Bavarian and Lombard laws. Therefore, he ordered to his *missus dominicus* to consult the entire population over the chapters added to the original law. Obviously, there was not a real chance to refuse a certain chapter but still it is a demonstration of how important was to obtain people's consensus. This procedure might be seen as a sort of early type of people's referendum even though the king was not really asking for a real opinion. But, it can certainly be said that this particular structure is still in use today during the organisation of modern European and national referendums.

Due to all the conspiracies the king had to face he decided that anyone would have pledged of allegiance. In 789 the *missus dominicus* were sent to all the provinces of the kingdom to make any person pronounce that formula. They had to make any bishop, abbot, count, royal vassal and ecclesiastical dignitary swear; then, every count should have organised the allegiance of any person living in its countship. In 802, after the coronation, the king imposed the renewal of the pledge to all his subjects.

The tremendous labour of unification made during the Carolingian era has left a profound sign on the countries that were part of Charlemagne's empire that can be recognised even today. At the height of its expansion the kingdom was composed of hundreds of provinces each controlled by a count. In scholastic books we can read that Charlemagne divided his kingdom in different countship but it is not true because he just strengthened a system of mandates that was already in use in the local government of the Frankish kingdom.

Then, he extended that system to the new acquired territories thus helping the process of integration inside the empire. After 774 but above all after the Lombard revolt in 776 the Frankish counts started to be inserted in the Italian provinces; between 778 and 781 in Aquitaine, in 780 in Thuringia and finally the moment of Saxony and Bavaria arrived in 782 and 788 respectively. In the administrative jargon the province given to a count was called *pagus*³⁸. At the time of Charlemagne another term was in use: *comitatus*³⁹. In Gaul and Italy the countship could coincide with a diocese forcing a count to live with a bishop. Every count was the representation of a political centre that coordinated different spheres but whose only limit was the presence of special ecclesiastical possessions that had received some particular concessions by the king. But, what was exactly the power of a count? First of all, we have to specify that in his province the count represented the king by collecting taxes, administering the justice, publishing and ordering the execution of the royal orders and finally by gathering the army. Contrary to popular beliefs, he did not have an hereditary power but he was a sort of employed of the king and could be fired whenever the king decided. They were very rich people who had vast territories and a network of influential people around them. The king arranged that any count needed a certain amount of monetary and physical resources and so he left them part of the taxes and part of the state-owned lands. There is now an important argument that has to be clarified: the march. Scholastic books have always said that the division of the Frankish territory included a march and the control of marquis but the reality is a bit different. The countship was the main territorial district of the empire and the term march designated only the frontier areas that were in close contact with the pagan territories of other civilisations. The person who ruled those territories was still called count and due to the risks that he could face in those territories

³⁸ To be more precise the term had already been coined in the western Roman Empire to indicate the smaller administrative district of a province.

³⁹ An ancient structure that involved that the control of a territory was under the rule of a king with the consultation of his warriors.

the king ordered the creation of some military commands on the *limes*⁴⁰. In some cases the military and organisational responsibility of those territories was given to a duke.

Under the counts we can find the figure of the royal vassal, or *vassus dominicus*. These people were notables who entered the service of the king through a pledge and conducted any single task the king necessitated. They received a reward, extracted from the taxes, when they did their job well.

The problem of this system was the control of the behaviour of the counts. This task was generally conducted by the members of the Church but the institution that was created to control the counts were the *missus dominicus*. This figure was an emissary of the king who was ordered to go to a specific territory. He had to settle in the house of the count guilty of bad administration and help him repair the situation. This system represented a great effort toward an administrative centralisation. Moreover, they were ordered to register the actions taken and then make a report that would have been given to the king. The only problem was that they were not incorruptible and it happened frequently that they did not follow their normal orders when they were given a certain amount of money. An interesting thing of this figure is that they were bishops, abbots or counts most of the time but the division between the religious and the political spheres was not as marked as it is nowadays. The second important novelty in the system was the introduction of a new concept in 802: the *missaticum*. It was a territorial district, given to a couple of *missi*, whose boundaries were decided following some geographical criterions. We can say that in 802 Charlemagne gave the task of controlling the entire administrative and ecclesiastic apparatus to a certain number of members of the clergy and the aristocracy that lived nearby. As we already said, the control of the territory, the placement of the population and the maintenance of the public order were run by the king through the use of the Roman Church. Bishops and abbots were important elements of the public sphere and

⁴⁰ It is the ancient name of the border used in the Roman Empire.

received tasks and orders by the emperor as any other employee. They were selected directly by the king and had they had the advantage that their cultural level was superior to that of the laic ministers. Certainly, their use had suffered a reduction during the centuries, in fact the bishops of the Gaul had had much greater fiscal, judiciary and military powers during the Merovingian era.

8 The situation of inland revenue: how it was organised

An essential element of the royal power was the king's property, also called fiscal property. At that time the words inland revenue designated the patrimony and the revenues of the king before being associated with the tax collection. The fiscal possessions of the Frankish kings were created during the invasions and increased with any new conquest. They represented an immense patrimony with a multitude of *villae*⁴¹ inside of it. Charlemagne and his father considered the territories in the hand of the Church as an extension of the public dominions whose revenues were at the king's disposal. The inland revenue had a central role in the use of the power because it was the principal source of income but it also permitted the direct control over the areas that composed the public territories. As it was previously underlined the words inland revenue indicated the state property and not an amount of taxes. This does not mean that an amount of obligatory services was inexistent and this is one of the first things we have to analyse. The *missus*, the ambassadors and any single person that was working for the king had the privilege and the right of being hosted by the inhabitants. At the same time those people could confiscate horses, armed convoys, and even food if it was necessary. These kind of obligations were the main participation of the inhabitants to the functioning of the public power and they burdened mostly the independent

⁴¹ The term *villae* refers to the ancient country houses that were typical of the Roman world.

landowners and the free tenants. The services that were due to the king never regarded the use of money that should have enriched the royal treasure. The *census* was an annual rent paid by the peasants, free people, freedmen and public slaves who lived in the territories of the monarchy. A *teloneo* was a monetary tax that was withdrawn from the circulation and selling of products. It was a contribution requested by the government in order to offer some public services like the maintenance of a bridge or a port. But the king had to impose a control over this tax because of the corruption present among those who were in charge of the collection. The local authorities often multiplied the amount of this taxes because it was easy to escape central control.

9 The modern aspect of Carolingian justice

The justice was one of the most important aspects of the Carolingian empire because it had some elements that are still recognisable today and that made Charlemagne's kingdom more sophisticated than historians believed. The main activities of the Carolingian officials were the military organisation of the population and the management of justice. This last field was not ruled by some experts but it was in the hand of local officials that represented the king: the counts. Every count had to preside over a public assembly called *mallus* which was held a certain number of times a year. He had to listen to the problems and take decisions with the support of a jury composed of the local inhabitants. These people were named *boni homnes* and were chosen from the notables who had a practical knowledge of the law. *Placitum* was the name of a single assembly and it was a real burden for the population and this is why the king limited the number to three *placita* a year. The same type of organisation had a sort of specular structure at the local level and with much frequency where some lower-ranked people, *iuniores*, were in charge of the role. It might have happened that the count was supported or even substituted

by the local bishop. Moreover, there were some areas where justice was exercised with a special form. The important thing we have to note is that the public justice was a perfect example of a unifying element. In addition to the juridical levels just mentioned, there was another step with great importance: the *palatium*⁴², the place where the decisions were taken by the king. The justice of the palace had both a religious and a political aspect and the palace was like a sort of supreme tribunal to which a lot of people could appeal. Everyone who believed that the decision of a local judge had been taken badly could present a quarrel against that person. If the complainer was right the judge would have been punished. Those quarrels went under examination of the count of the palace who could take an immediate decision if the case was simple and did not require the intervention of the king. Instead Charlemagne's intervention was required when the case was particularly serious and he was even supported by some counsellors whose number depended on its seriousness. There is an important element that needs to be underlined: even if we might imagine that the tribunals decided relying only on a speech, the truth is that the written evidence was decisive. By the way there was a scarcity of written documents because people tried to destroy any single evidence that could make them lose a case. This is the main reason behind the necessity of having some witness. They were not requested by the judge but it was the person sued who had to find them in order to defend himself. A real convocation of witness by the court could take place only through a particular procedure called *inquisition per testes* where the judge interrogated the witness. A lot of times there could be a private negotiated solution between the complainer and the defendant and it was essential to nominate an arbitrator with whom they obligated themselves to respect the decision taken. A pledge of allegiance by the person sued was needed when there were no evidences or witness. By the way, the person sued had to find other people who had to

⁴² The modern meaning of the palace derives from the ancient term *palatium* that indicated the Palatine Hill, where the palace of the Roman emperors was located.

pledge with him. It was a sort of last resort when the cause was hard to solve. Last but not least, the trial by ordeal represented a truly aberrant form of judgment. According to the contemporaries it was god who had the ability to judge when a situation requiring the ordeal occurred. This type of justice could have different forms like the firewalking or the immersion of a hand into hot water. In certain cases the will of god could be manifested through a judiciary duel. These are probably some of the practices that totally separate us from the Carolingian society even if the king tried to reduce its use. The bishop Agobard of Lyon was among the few people who condemned a similar practice because he understood its absurdity.

As we can expect, the Carolingian justice was facing the problem of corruption and in particular the scarce trustworthiness of the judges. We have already mentioned that the counts who had this important task did not have any real juridical preparation. But, the most annoying problem was that they were busy gaining personal success and this made them particularly prone to corruption. Alcuin was one of the promoters of a justice reform that could solve the problem once for all. It was necessary to eliminate any form of corruption and the creation of the *Admonitio generalis* had this objective: any single gift to a judge was prohibited. Even the reform of the *missi dominici* that took place in 802 was a path toward this direction. Another important change ordered by Charlemagne was the creation of a totally new jury. It was necessary to have more competent people in the legal field without representing a cost for free men. In 802 the *missi dominici* were given even the responsibility of controlling the various tribunals. In case of necessity they could even take the place of the judge and run the case. The tribunals underwent a modification that consisted in the institution of the professional schepen, a professional lifetime juror who was supervised by the *missi*: every county have a group of seven permanent schepens. The details we have about this new category suggest that they did not have a professional preparation and they could be part of the clients of a count. On the contrary, the real novelty is

that the new jury composed of *cheapens* did not burdened the inhabitants with the costs of justice. There is now a further step that has to be noticed: the privatisation of justice. At that time it was at its very beginning when the free men left the management of the juridical procedure to the vassals of the counts after being saved from the burden of the *placitum*.

Several times Charlemagne told the counts to judge following the law and not their will but this was clearly something hard to impose because they had a scarce knowledge of the laws and there was not a single code but a multitude of codes; this was due to the possibility of being judged with everyone's national law. Due to the diffusion of the Franks in almost any area made the presence of two different kind of laws the norm but the number raised to three if we counted the Roman law that was used by the Church. This complicated picture rendered the situation much more difficult because a judge should have decided what law needed to be applied. The national laws had too many gaps and contradictions to rely on them and this is why the imperial capitularies were issued. What Charlemagne made was a renewal of this kind of legislation which became more articulated and systematic and he promoted their transcription: the result was the drafting of the *Lex Saxonum* in 785.

10 An interesting cultural innovation

Charlemagne was an extremely curious person even though he did not receive any education in his childhood. When he became an adult he wanted to be surrounded by a conspicuous number of intellectuals that could help him feed his curiosity. He started studying the *trivium* and *quadrivium* and after acquiring a good level of Latin grammar he decided to create a Frankish language grammar. An interesting fact is that the king could read but he could not write because of what we have just said. Some of the most important scholars worked with the king and Alcuin was probably the best known of

them; he even coined the words Palatine Academy. He was so important that the king could even question him about political matters. None of them was a Frank but they had different nationality due to the bad condition of the contemporary Frankish culture. By referring to this cultural innovation it is necessary to underline that the main sphere that it changed was the religious one. One of the priorities of his important programme was the revision of the biblical text. By the way the presence of those intellectuals did not last the entire reign of the king and they had returned to their lives before the year 800, even if they still helped the king during the assembly. It should not be surprising that the great period of cultural revolution happened during their permanence around Charles. The Carolingian Renaissance is the name given to this important programme of renovation which had to do with the religious sphere and the main idea behind it was the improvement. Christianity is the religion of the book and it needs to be taught to other people who know very little about religion. It becomes logical to presume that the members of the clergy should have had a good knowledge of it. The reform becomes a helpful tool to relaunch culture and in particular, to make the functioning of the Church and the life of the Christian population more organised. His father Pepin and his uncle Carloman had already understood a similar necessity back in 741 when they received the reign from Charles Martel and saw that the cultural situation of the Frankish territories was undergoing a terrible period; In Gaul the production of books had almost disappeared. After the death of Charles Martel the situation changed and Pepin gave a start to a new path under the supervision of Saint Boniface. He also needed the help of his counts to eliminate any form of paganism and to force the priests to obey the bishops. Saint Boniface was became an archbishop thanks to the pope, thus receiving enough authority to correcting the behaviour of the riotous bishops. One of the problem that might have occurred was the possibility that an episcopacy remained empty or taken by a layman. Through a profound analysis of this fact Charlemagne was able to put a bishop in any single diocese of his

territories. The previously mentioned *Admonitio generalis* of 789 was a collection of norms issued through the centuries by popes and councils that were reunited under the direction of the Roman Curia to become the basis of the life of a Christian of the Carolingian Empire. Moreover, during the last years of the VIII century and in the first years of the following century, many bishops imitated what Alcuin was doing: they composed some booklet to explain the members of the clergy the problems of the liturgy.

In 802 Charlemagne promulgated a series of measures with the aim of requesting the collaboration of his subjects to get peace and justice in the kingdom. The king was still worried about the behaviour of the clergy and he decided to make a new poll. Therefore, in 811 he called all the bishops and the abbots of his empire to the annual assembly held in Aachen to question them about a few things and he discovered some flaws that he wanted to correct.

One of the first steps of the reform was the correction of the liturgical books because it was necessary to have a unique kind of celebration in the whole empire and because of his alliance with the pope. Definitely, it was this necessity that made Charlemagne and his intellectuals work on a single code that could be complete and useful. It had always been a dream for the king to produce an amended and correct Bible that could replace all the gross productions that were used by the priests. Another important kind of book was the Latin grammar book where the priests learned the language. It became essential to revive the ecclesiastical schools to help children get a well-structured education; and, in 789 the *Admonitio generalis* moved toward this direction by ordering that religious ministers take children, both from free men or slaves, in order to reunite them in schools and to give them a religious education. It is certainly too early to see a scholastic reform in this picture but its value should not be denied. From now on, Every priest living on the farmland had to give a primary school education which meant that he had to teach reading. The only school not controlled by the clergy was the imperial school, available for the sons of the officials and the sons of the servants.

Another field that captured the attention of Charlemagne was the library. At that time a book was an investment due to the price of parchments and skilled manpower. The king encouraged those kind of investments through preferring and financing those abbots that wanted to expand their libraries. At the beginning of the 780s he sent a newsletter to all the areas of his vast territories for requesting everyone's help. Anyone who had or had copied the masterpieces of the classical authors and of the Fathers of the Church would have been helpful to his cause. Once the Palatine Library was completed it was possible to organise the copy of all the texts that the king wanted everyone to use. The aim of this project was obviously the unification of the knowledge.

CHAPTER II

THE ANCESTOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1 A founding myth

This part has the aim of finding all the possible links that connect the European Union with the empire created by Charlemagne thus giving a personal analysis of the matter with a mixture of historical facts. The idea behind it is the belief that the subject of the present discussion was and still is somehow the foundational myth of the European Union. The concept needs to be clarified: the previous statements do not have to lead you toward the wrong idea. When Charlemagne is related to the Union it only means that we can discover a few of the primitive bases of the community itself. The actions, structures and aims of this big organisation cannot be more different than they are from those of the king, nonetheless his ideas and credos came to life for the second time in history. They remain still alive behind all the walls, the structures and the things that were added to the first concept of the European Union.

A myth is a collection of stories, events and people that pretend to describe the origin of some feature of the social, natural, political and historical world. It is useful to explain how a custom, an object, an event or even an entity find their birth. It is the case for example of the myths related to the constellations that have been used throughout the centuries to reveal an imminent series of events, facts, situation. A good example of this is the prediction of the end of a certain calendar, that was wrongly interpreted as the end of the world, made by the Mayas. The word itself comes from the Greek "mythos" that means speech or discourse but which gained the meaning of fable and legend. As we can expect there are a lot of different types of myth such as the Creation myth that explains the origin of the universe or an Etiological myth which is about the origin of natural phenomena, names and so on. A political myth instead is used to explain the origin of a particular political feature, organization, concept etc... One of the most famous mythologies is probably the creation of Rome which is historically connected to the figures of Romulus, Remus and

the Capitoline wolf that raised them. By the way, there are a lot of definitions that can describe this simple word and that give different points of view of what it is.

It was essential to give at least a brief definition and some examples of this topic because of the necessity to define the role of Charlemagne in giving a path to the European union.

There is no need to give a historical description of when mythology developed and what transformations it underwent, but we only have to remember that almost any political organization, nation, city and so on has its own mythical origin. This is due to the fact that any kind of entity needed and still needs a figure, an event or a series of things that increase its political and historical importance. In the past it was essential to gain prestige, political power and political legitimacy. The great kings, queens of the European royal houses had always tried to bequeath their myths to the sons: the house of Habsburgs and the house of Bourbon had them. It helped those great personalities remain in power for centuries.

As far as Charlemagne is concerned, not only he was one of the most relevant historical figures of Europe but he represents the myth at the base of modern European history. And the question that needs to find an answer is: what are the elements that make him deserve the title *Rex Pater Europæ*?

2 The Franco-German axis: a timeless element

If we have to find some connections between the vast empire created by the king of the Franks and the modern European Union there is a first assumption that has to be done: The European Union has never officially recognised its paternity to Charlemagne. But there are a few details and facts that can connect the organisation with the king; plus some historical circumstances prove that this thesis might be valid. France and Germany are

two of the states that are interested the most by the territorial expansion of the empire. The death of Charlemagne and the division of the empire among his sons marked the definitive crack of the west European territories. On one side we have the territories inhabited by Franks that correspond to the modern areas of Belgium and France; on the other side we find the areas controlled by populations with a German language which means the modern Germany, Austria, Holland and Luxembourg. These last populations also controlled the majority of the Italian peninsula that after its division would find another unity only in 1861 with the help of Camillo Benso count of Cavour and the king Vittorio Emanuele II . The division of the empire means an important consequence in the European territory. It was an event that permitted some of the dynamics that influenced a hundred years of European history. For almost ten centuries the political events in the European continent were characterised by the competition and the fight among the two main descendants of Charlemagne's sons: France and Germany have constantly tried their supremacy for the control of west Europe. This situation was even worsened by a disequilibrium that existed between the two: Though being smaller France had reached a territorial and political unification under the control of a strong central government⁴³ while Germany was bigger and with a bigger population but it was politically fragmented with parts of the country under the influence of other states. That was the case of Bavaria and Rhineland which had been Napoleonic first and Austrian then. Germany unification happened in 1870 under the control of Otto von Bismarck and William I of Prussia. Therefore there have been periods of long and bloody fight for hegemony characterising the relations of these two important civilisations with their peaks during the two World Wars. Thanks to those who fought Nazism and Fascism there was the birth of a common civil consciousness that led to the creation of a European peace at the end of these two disastrous wars. It all happened in a moment when, due to the effects of the wars, Europe lost its

⁴³ We have to remember that the enlightened absolutism was a French creation.

central role that passed to the USSR and the United States which were the two great winners. Three were the cause that brought to this peace: the Christian-democratic matrix of the French Schuman, the German Adenauer and the Italian De Gasperi, the founding fathers, the historically Europeanist liberal democratic matrix of Kant, Altiero Spinelli and Giuseppe Mazzini) and finally, the socialist matrix that was linked to the international workers movement. These three causes were certainly different but they had in common the will to establish a peaceful and democratic cohabitation in opposition to the nationalist right credo. The foundation of the European community institutions and their following developments designed by important personalities such as Mollet, Spaak, Brandt, Mitterand, Giscard, Kohl, Delors, Prodi have permitted centuries of great economic development and social wealth to the old continent thus making the inclusion of most of today European countries into the Union a possible thing. The most valuable asset that the European Union has given to its citizens is a period of peace and stability among the different members, a result reached through the creation of an equilibrium between French and Germans that solved all the ancient rivalries. It is this construction of peace itself that that made the European union a interesting destination to all the members that are not part of it yet. And, the biggest aim that this Union has is to find a cooperation and integration with the other European countries. To do so it is important to have efficient and functional institutions; when this step is under construction we have to remember that the collaboration and equilibrium between France and Germany should always be a constant without which there would not be a European union and there would not be peace, democracy and of the values that the community has brought with it.

In addition to this, the writer Robert D. Kaplan⁴⁴ showed how the distribution of modern economic weakness reflects the ancient division of the European

⁴⁴ Robert D. Kaplan is a writer and a politician whose main works regard foreign affairs and travels. 2012 and 2014, he was chief geopolitical analyst at Stratford.

territories between Carolingians, Prussians, Habsburgs, Byzantines and Ottomans.

It is really interesting to find on the internet some articles and books that see the new Franco-German axis as a possible return of a sort of Carolingian Empire. In particular, an article published on the website orthodox England discusses about the parallelism between Aachen and the empire of Charlemagne and Berlin and the European Union. The European Union of December 2011 is a relaunch of the Carolingian Empire created in Aachen by Charlemagne on the 25 December 800. The announcement that Croatia was about to join the EU back in 2013 only adds more relevance to the Carolingian impact; for much of Croatia was part of those areas that were under the influence of Charlemagne 1211 years ago. Today Aachen has been replaced by Berlin, which established the euro as the currency of choice for German exporters. The historian Albert A. Nofi mentioned a similar concept in his book *Dirty Little Secrets*:

“The European Resistance to the Return of the Carolingian Empire- Some 1200 years ago, Germans and French were united under the emperor Charlemagne in the Carolingian empire. While that empire is long gone, many Europeans fear it is returning. This can be seen in an interesting dynamic developing in the European Union (EU). The two principal continental members, France and Germany, are finding most of the other members increasingly aligned against them. This is probably less because Britain, Spain, Italy, Poland, etc., are all that worried about Iraq than about European issues. The other powers are worried about the revival of the Carolingian Empire. Between them, the French and Germans have tended to dominate the EU bureaucracy, and have been imposing a lot of restrictions on the commerce

of many of the other members, in the form of "standardization" of manufacturing and quality guidelines."⁴⁵

Following the theory just mentioned it should not be surprising that the first states that created the Union are all territories that were located inside or at least in part of what was the Frankish Empire. If we compare the maps of the EU with that of Charlemagne's dominions we can see that, along with France and Germany, the states members such as Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg were dominions of his kingdom. This cannot be a coincidence but the effect of a sense of commonality and membership to something that had the beginning in the historical creation that received the name of Holy Roman Empire. And, all the articles, quotations and authors just mentioned seem to prove this type of relation by underlying the connection between modern and Carolingian times and mentioning a similar geo-political situation. Although some historians have always tried to connect the empire created by Charlemagne with the Roman Empire, as in the case of Le Goff, it is a point of view with which we have tried to disagree. First of all. If we accept that the Carolingian empire was trying to create an second Roman Empire than we have to accept that modern Europe is extremely related to the Romans because there are a lot of elements that might be found both in Charlemagne's and Roman's eras. The empire that was created and extended by Rome had a totally different geographical size which included the populations of northern Africa and the territories of the Byzantine Empire. Today there exist a lot of discussions that focus on a Mediterranean identity but its nucleus is located in the northern part of the sea rather than in the southern. A modern European would hardly feel any kind of brotherhood and connection with an African. Second, if that assumption about the imitation was right than the Frankish king was trying to recreate a geographical space that could match the one created by the Romans. In the first part of this thesis.

⁴⁵ Albert A. Nofi, *Dirty Little Secrets*, St. Martin's Press, 1999.

But above all in the third, there have been clear demonstrations that he had no such political project. Charles never wanted to reconquer the Byzantine Empire or the north African territories previously lost to the Arabs. It should convince you more the explanation about the Franco-German issue that cannot be found before the second half of the VIII century.

3 An unofficial recognition

As far as the matter of the official recognition is concerned, it was underlined at the beginning of this section that there has never been any official recognition made by the European Union of the role Charlemagne had in founding the community. But, is there any sign that can trace a line backward that lead us to the VIII-IX centuries? The answer is yes of course. The most evident proof is the dedication to the king of an important building of the Union: the Charlemagne building located in Brussels. The building was built in 1967 for the Council's secretariat of the European Union and then renovated in 1998 to receive a totally different destination. It now houses the Directorate-General for economic and financial affairs, the Directorate-General for Enlargement of the European Commission and the Directorate-General for trade. If this is not enough to say that there is an unofficial recognition, then we have to move toward another important step of the European Union. This step is called the European Charlemagne Prize which represents an inspirational award for many people. From 1950 this prize is given to any person who contributes to the understanding of European values and that works for the community and to make the world a peaceful place. It is held in the city of Aachen because of the importance it had in the past: it was the centre of western Europe, the city where the palace of the king was built. Then, in 2008 came the creation of a similar prize but dedicated to another category of people. The European Charlemagne Youth Prize is a new award

whose main objective is creation and development of a European consciousness among young people. The European Union is trying to get a closer integration of the younger generations into the community thus promoting examples of European identity through this category. Therefore, the process of creation of a better, united and more complex community receives the name of a person who lived centuries earlier.

The year 2014 represents the anniversary of the king's death. Twelfth centuries have passed and around Europe a lot of countries have organised a series of conferences to remember about the great value this personality had . The most relevant was the one held in Paris from the 26 to the 28 March with the title *Charlemagne, les temps, les espaces, les homes, construction et déconstruction d'un règne*⁴⁶. But there is another interesting exhibition called *Imperiituro, renovatio imperii*⁴⁷ held in Ravenna from the 4 October 2014 to the 20 January 2015. This second exhibition is part of the Cradles of European Culture project which is funded by the European Commission in order to create a link between the countries who are part of the European Union. Furthermore, this is just one of nine exhibitions that will take place in nine different sites of the European continent.

If we exclude the indirect recognitions of the European Community we can nonetheless gaze at the international press and realise that there are others who want Charlemagne to be a central figure in the creation of the Union. We are referring to the weekly newspaper *The Economist* which is organised in different sections and is about different arguments related to the political and economic world. The section or better said the columns regarding the situation of the European economic and political policies was given the name Charlemagne. As we have just seen there are a lot of sources, events and facts that give an incredible importance to the king. Certainly, the European commission funds other exhibitions and events about other historical people

⁴⁶ All the information about the conference can be found at this website: www.charlemagne.hypotheses.org.

⁴⁷ All the information about the exposition can be found at this website: www.imperiituro.eu.

but the reference toward Charles must be more continuous and extended. This point of view seems to be confirmed by the international world when using his name to write discussions about Europe. Does any other person find his name continuously used on the matter? Definitely not. This is not an opinion but a fact.

4 Elements in common: justice and currency

Frankish justice was complicated by the fact that there were two different levels of juridical norms. We have already seen that the Frankish kingdom permitted the existence of different codes in any territory it controlled. This was due to the presence of a Frankish code that spread everywhere after the conquest of a new territory thus making its use necessary. At the same time Charlemagne left to the populations the possibility to use their code. He gave the possibility to the people living inside his dominions to be judged according to the laws of their place of origin. Because of the gaps present in the national law the king ordered the creation of the imperial capitularies that could clarify certain situations and the transcription of the territorial codes. Can we see any similarity with the juridical system of the European Union? Obviously the European Union has a much more complex system that includes a communitarian level and a national level. In the common level we can find customary international laws, regulations, decisions and directives which should all enter the national level according to the national system of each state: they gain the legislative level depending on the means of acquisition and it could become a normal law or a constitutional law. The Frankish system was not organised in the same way but it shares with the European Union the idea of the national and the local laws.

Along with the justice there is another field where an important similarity rises to become one of the modern symbols of the European Union: the

communitarian currency. The euro was introduced as an accounting currency in 1999 and became a physical banknote in 2001, thus entering into circulation. But it was obviously an innovation that needed years of preparation and discussions among the members of the organisation. This currency is one of the most influential currencies of the world and it is used in almost every country of the European Union. It is the central bank the entity in charge of issuing and retiring a necessary quantity of currency in order to stabilise the market.

The Carolingian empire created a unique currency for its territories first under Pepin and then under Charlemagne and his son Louis the Pious. Charlemagne realised a reform whose main objective was the imposition of a monometallic standard based on silver coin in circulation instead of the bimetallic standard used by the Roman Empire. Some historians believe that it was due to the reduction of currency circulation and a death of exchanges that the king made the reform. But, the truth is that gold never stopped circulating. The smallest unit in circulation was the gold *Tremissis*⁴⁸ When the coinage and circulation of a new silver coin started, the denier, this novelty did not become the sign of a crisis but a retake of commerce. The legislative interventions of Pepin and, then, of Charlemagne not only encouraged and supervised the coinage of silver diners but also saw the potential of unification contained in this new coin . Through this reform they favoured the adoption of a unique monetary system in western Europe whose destiny was its survival until the French Revolution and even the Great Britain of 1970. Silver money had to be the only kind of legal tender coined in the empire and its multiples were used during transactions as an artificial sum for purchases. With the reform the king did nothing but increasing the weight of the new currency but we will see a more detailed analysis when focusing on the critical part by Alessandro Barbero. Charlemagne decided to move to a system based on wheat grain and established that silver money should have weighed as much as 32 wheat grains

⁴⁸ The *tremissis* is an ancient roman currency who value was around one third of a solidus.

that is 1,7 grams. The transformation decided by the king meant that its coins became heavier and much more appreciated than those of his predecessors.

Charlemagne even centralised the production and creation of this currency by reclaiming the coinage monopoly in favour of the royal mints. Before this decision it was the cloister that freely coined money as much as they wished. From now on, it was the king, and not the manufacturer, who guaranteed the good quality of the currency. The whole empire would have seen the circulation of a unique currency model Charlemagne clearly gave his empire a homogeneous instrument that could guarantee the quality of money and its full circulation among the boundaries of his territories. The fact that various kings imitated the monometallic kind of coinage made the king a visionary. By the way it is important to underline that despite the Carolingian reform the West remained deprived of a small unit of money that could be useful during everyday exchanges. It is not really clear how someone could buy a single piece of bread. The project saw a step further under the reign of Louis the Pious, the son of the emperor who create a *Christiana religio* coinage. Louis eliminated the differences of his father's currency by reducing the coin model to a very few types. All over his empire there occurred an elimination of foreign currencies and a multiplication of those models proposed. The coin of Louis was inspired by the religion and in particular the history of David and Salomon. In 822-823 it was delivered the second version of his coin with the image of a temple with the inscription *Christiana religio* replacing the name of the mint. After the death of Charlemagne's son in 840 no other singular model of coin was produced⁴⁹.

Today the coinage of the euro is administered by the European Central Bank (ECB)⁵⁰ with the help of the European System of Central Banks (ESCB) which includes all the central banks of each country. In a certain way it is

⁴⁹ Simon Coupland, *The Medieval Euro*, in: «History Today», volume 52, 6 June 2002.

⁵⁰ For more information about the euro system you can find them inside the ECB website: www.ecb.europa.eu.

possible to affirm that Charlemagne acted as a sort of Central Bank. The currency created by the Carolingians did not have the economic and political weight the euro has but we have to focus on the singularity of the event: the creation of a unique currency that could be used in totally different territories with a multitude of cultures and languages. It was even used when purchasing products from other countries which means that its value should not be underestimated. Obviously we have to wait centuries before seeing the birth of this structure but a few similarities are recognisable. The euro is the currency of states that cover a much greater geographical space and whose concept had been imagined and realised some twelve centuries earlier.

CHAPTER III

THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE HISTORIANS: WHAT THEY THINK OF CHARLEMAGNE AS FATHER OF EUROPE

1 Le Goff and the Roman Empire

This is a critical part where Charlemagne is analysed through the eyes of three different historians with a totally different historical background. First we can see Le Goff presenting the king with a typical 1980s view. Then we will move to a professor whose important work perfectly represents the modern flow of opinion. Alessandro Barbero's book is so relevant that it was even chosen to become the main source of an article about the king in the review *Focus*⁵¹. Finally it will be time to take into account the point of view of Lucien Febvre whose opinion are somehow reconciling the first two different conceptions.

The person to be chosen as the starting point of this thesis is Le Goff who dedicated his life studying the middle ages with particular attention to the Carolingian king. The famous historian Jacques Le Goff, during a recent interview⁵², stated that Charlemagne, even though certainly unifying part of the European continent, he did not have any consciousness of Europe as we know it. Le Goff said that in the IX Century the idea of Europe did not exist. By receiving the crown from the Pope Leon III the king was not looking to the future but backward. In fact his model was the roman empire, not a futuristic idea of Europe and he wanted to revive the roman society through a strong spirit of Christianity. Certainly his project was futuristic in some way due to all the projects that he dreamt and that he was able to achieve in part.

Thanks to his contribution he united together different populations such as Latins and Germans and thus combining together the roman and the barbarian traditions. According to the historian, given these facts, we can obviously state that he was one of the founders of the medieval society. He was therefore a protagonist of the Early Middle Ages but not the father of Europe.

⁵¹ Aldo Carioli, *Le radici dell'Europa*, in «Focus Storia: Scoprire il passato, capire il presente», n.98, December 2014.

⁵² Fabio Gambaro, *Le Goff: "Non è vero che Carlo Magno fu Padre dell'Europa"*, in: «repubblica.it», 27 January 2014.

The interviewer and the historian discussed a bit on the argument, the first giving some statements of common knowledge and the second defending his position with a clear justification to all his arguments.

To those who think that the naissance of the Holy Roman Empire is seen as the first design of the current Europe Le Goff replies Charlemagne was not pursuing any idea of Europe. He was just thinking about the Roman Empire. The idea of Europe will come into the world much later. For example in the XV century the Pope Pius II wrote in Latin the treaty *De Europa* where the idea of Europe is presented as something present and desirable.

The historian had an interesting picture of the most distinguishable aspects among the actions of Charlemagne. He considered of great importance one aspect that is usually not discussed by most historians. During the Nicean Council, before becoming Emperor, the king defended and imposed the use of images (iconolatry), opposing himself to iconoclasm. That was widespread practice particularly common in the Byzantine Empire. By pushing Christianity to authorise the creation and diffusion of holy images, Charlemagne gave to that religion such a fantastic form of expression.

When talking about what people called the Carolingian Renaissance, it is essential to note that the entire medieval period underwent a series of renaissances that were all born from the memory of the Roman Empire. Among them we can find also the Carolingian Renaissance. That period appealed to all the cultural forces that could be found in the Holy Roman Empire. Charlemagne reunited in his court a lot of great intellectuals of his time that came from extremely different parts of the world: Irish, Franks, Germans, Spanish, etc... In this field he moved toward a European perspective but without having neither the willingness nor the consciousness of it. It is the willingness to give such a great impulse to culture that makes him one of the central figures of the medieval period. So many legends were then born around this indubitable historical fact. He was given an important role in the promotion of schools and he was even transformed into a sort of Jules Ferry of

the IX century. But, in reality, his actions were directed at a small group in fact they were limited to favouring the creation of schools for the children of the aristocracy. He wanted to create a skilled aristocracy that could work efficiently on the administration of the empire. This great dedication to the administration field is a very important aspect of his endeavour. To this purpose a certain mention has to be given to the *missus dominicus* who were sent to the different areas of the empire. But they were just a small detail inside a much more extended administrative formula which was exhibited through the proclamation of the Capitularies.

It has always been underlined that Charlemagne dedicated much effort to spread the teaching of the liberal arts of the *trivium*⁵³ and the *quadrivium*⁵⁴. Is this true or not? According to Le Goff it is. First of all because the system of the liberal arts, that later in the XII century would favour the creation of the university, existed before his reign. The *trivium* and the *quadrivium* were already present at the time of Saint Benedict in the VI century. Therefore, Charlemagne was not the initiator but rather an “helper”. Yet, it is essential to underline the heritage left: the Carolingian minuscule⁵⁵. This was particularly used by the scholars of the Holy Roman Empire. Even in this case, the invention is not attributed to him but the adoption and diffusion of this calligraphy is a defining feature of his intellectual policy and of his will of unification.

Intellectuals have long wondered whether his actions were important for the stabilisation of Christianity, and the answer of the historian is that once again we are in the mythical sphere. The force and influence of the Christianity were assured before his reign. If Christianity went on existing even after his death, it is not due to his actions. Maybe, It is possible to interpret his victory over the Lombards as a tribute to the defence of the religion but I see it more as a

⁵³ grammar, rhetoric and dialectics.

⁵⁴ arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music.

⁵⁵ At the time of Charlemagne this minuscule represented a novelty because it was more practical, uniform and with the letters more aligned than the previous writing. The king permitted the spread of this new writing that would have represented the only until today.

retake of the policy of conquest of the roman antiquity. It is certainly true that Charlemagne was considered a hero at the time of the Crusades but he was never a crusader even though he was depicted this way in the *Chanson de Roland*. As far as the relations with the oriental world are concerned he was only trying to consolidate his own authority through some symbolical exchanges. These were made with the big personalities of the other part of the world such as the Empress Irene of Constantinople and the Caliph Harun Al Rashid.

Among all the figures of the medieval history, Charlemagne is the one that has seen more legends growing around him. The unordinary figure of the king was immediately transformed into an exceptional person especially thanks to the epic poems that contributed to the birth of the myth. More recently, the elaboration of the legend of Charlemagne has met another important moment after the Second World War. It happened when, with the Treaty of Rome 1957⁵⁶, the European community started to form. The managers of this Europe wishing for unification, Schuman, Adenauer, De Gasperi, were Christian Democrats. Therefore they chose Charlemagne, whom they considered the symbol of the defence of a Christian continent, as the patron of the growing Europe. In this way they contributed to the strengthening of the myth.

1.1 Le Goff's idea of Europe

In 2001 Turin hosted the conference «Europe and Museums. Identities and Representations». The aim of this conference was the creation of a European museum that could explain to any visitor the history of the creation of the European Union. This history was supposed to mention not only the

⁵⁶ It was signed the 25 March 1957 by France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and West Germany and instituted the European Economic Community. It survived until 1993 when the Treaty of Maastricht was signed.

various moments during the XX Century that saw the creation of that organisation, but also a much older history that could date back to the Middle Ages and even before.

During this conference Le Goff gave a speech about the idea of Europe and the real role Charlemagne had in forming this territory⁵⁷.

Part of the speech included the same theories he affirmed during the interview already mentioned before but he also gave some more information about the concept of Europe and its origin.

On that occasion, Le Goff told the public that instead of one museum there should have been more museums. The reason behind it was that there is a unique Europe but at the same time it is different inside and it has to preserve all the diverse characteristics living inside this concept.

For the author the origin of this unity derived from the Middle Ages even though the name «Europe» preceded this period and it was, in fact, created during the Ancient Greece. Greek and Roman geographers were the first to describe this space as a geographical entity. There is actually a myth behind this name: the beautiful oriental called Europe who was raped by Zeus transformed as a bull; she was one of the multitude of women that the king of the Olympus loved. This was clearly an aristocrat origin with an oriental component in it. Therefore, we can assume that the European construction contained some oriental elements. During the entire medieval period, the oriental elements had a vital role on the collective imagination. Europe is certainly an occidental entity today but this does not mean that it is possible to forget the oriental atmosphere it always contained.

At a certain point of the conference he asked if we could affirm that the routes of Europe were created in ancient times. Le Goff believed that the tales of Roman and Greek historians were just the prelude of a real European history. As Mark Bloch showed us, Europe was produced between the IV and VII

⁵⁷ Jacques Le Goff, *Non siamo figli di Carlo Magno*, in: «repubblica.it», 5 April 2001.

centuries, at the same time as Christianity, and it was a combination of Barbarian, Italic, Germanic, Gallic, Celtic and Iberian components. The newcomers did fuse with the Italian-Romans, the Iberian-Romans and the Gallic-Romans. This fusion took place under the spirit of Christianity. Christianity had always had a strong connection with the ancient Greek-Latin culture and it is due to the great names of that heritage that Europe was born. Historians have always referred to Charlemagne as the father of Europe and they have always labelled the Carolingian Empire as the first real European construction. The famous orator disagrees with this point of view because, in his opinion, Charlemagne did not have in mind that project he had instead two aims: First of all, he wanted to recreate the Roman Empire and, second, he wanted to support the Frankish nationalism.

If we overlook the geography of the space we are considering, we can realise that all the European capitals have always had a peripheral position. Rome has always suffered because of a position not particularly favourable and decentralised in respect to the European continent but this never stopped intellectuals from undertaking long pilgrimages to arrive in Rome since the Middle Ages. The second important capital for Europeans is Jerusalem because it was becoming one of the main destinations for pilgrims and, from the XI to the XIII centuries, a city that should have been reconquered. The Holy Land becomes the destination, a place to be lived even without having any knowledge of it. As everyone knows, these were the times of the Crusades. This event seems to be important for Le Goff and he clarifies that it was a really sad episode, the result of a cultural mistake. Unfortunately, this episode left a really hostile sign in the mind of the oriental populations and Islam whose consequences are still visible in the modern relations among Muslims and Occidentals.

Christianity was the religion of memory. The great personalities of this religion were the Saints and their signs, their relics; things that had not only a spiritual and religious role but also an economic relevance in the

medieval Europe. At that time, the theft of those important pieces was economically profitable and we have to consider also another kind of act that is not only juridical. There were some sort of legal thefts that were even inspired by some famous examples. The case of Venice is one of the most relevant. The relics of Saint Mark were stolen from Alexandria. As far as the museum is concerned it should include some expositions of photos and reproductions of those relics thus allowing everyone to understand that they were the symbols of the construction of Europe in the Middle Ages.

It is essential to recognise that Charlemagne had the credit of doing such an important revolution in the cultural field, even though it was a superficial work more than expected. Finding the conditions to create a real European culture was impossible at that time. By the way, the king was able to form a group of intellectuals coming from a lot of different places of Europe; Gallics, Germans, Italians, Spanish from north Spain, Muslims, Irish and Anglo-Saxons, to name just a few.

The historiographic movement of the magazine *Annales*, of which Le Goff is a member, has always recommended that the historians elaborate a historical science considering the real problems first: the problems of the centre in respect to the periphery, the problems of the neighbourhood and those of the sea. Europe is a very small continent compared to the others and it is the continuation of the Eurasian continent. It is surrounded by a few seas. Compared to continents such as Africa, Asia and America, big continents with a huge extension of land, Europe maintains a very strong relationship with the sea.

A particular attention needs to be given to those museums that expose objects and artefacts made around the year 1000. That year has always been romantically considered a really dark and bad period in the European unconscious. And if we think about it, we can see some similarities between the fear that spread around that time and the worries that the population experienced when approaching the year 2000. By the way, the year 1000 was

a period of hope and dynamism, an exceptional time that permitted the growth of what would be the medieval Europe. The European scenery faced the appearance of new populations that would become what we name Europeans thanks to the conversion to Christianity. In the Middle Ages, the conversions were like entering a special group, as if someone entered the UN nowadays. Those populations were Slavics, Polish, Czechs, Hungarians, inhabitants that would refuse to be considered Europeans today. But recently, Poland, Hungary and Bohemia have continuously tried to knock on the door of Europe and finally entered⁵⁸. This is a period of time that needs to be shown to the public at this museum.

The presence of Jews in the medieval time underlines an important factor in the cultural movements of that age. The Jews and the Jewish culture are such a fundamental component of the medieval Europe and it was around that period that historiography found the first elements of their persecution. The anti-Semitism, as we know it, appeared only in the XIX century with the pseudo-scientific theories on race and it was announced by the sad experience of the persecution of Pogroms⁵⁹ during the Middle Ages. Le Goff strongly believes that the Europe people would find at the museum has to underline not only the great things happened but also all the mistakes and crimes. It would be great to hear people discuss about the Inquisition in order to explain all the outcomes of a horrible practice that is still present: Torture. Europe and the European civilisation both seem an essentially urban culture, but close to the cities the rural culture is still alive and has its roots in the Dark Ages. The farming and the urban cultures seemed to have entered a time of collaboration in those days. The kind of nutrition to be found in Europe determines some of the characteristics of the European population; bread and cereals were the main nourishments someone may have eaten, compared to other populations that

⁵⁸ The members of the European Union may be found at this page with details about the date of entrance and other important information. http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index_it.htm.

⁵⁹ John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

were used to consume corn and rice. There exist two opposite but complementary Europes: the Europe of butter and that of oil. A lot of Europeans love both. The same contrast exists between wine and beer. It is necessary to explain that the evolution of the European economy came through experiencing different difficulties. At the same time, we have to exhibit the paths that permitted the European regions to maintain good relations between them and with the other non-European regions. An entire section should be dedicated to the exhibitions of Champagne, those of Frankfurt, Geneva and Asti. Councils were another medieval manifestation with a religious value. Therefore, the Middle Ages were a fundamental epoch for the creation of the Europe of continuity. When the Dark Ages ended, Europe did not exist in terms of morality but the essential elements of its birth were already present. By the way, Europe was not destined to exist in the medieval following future. Nowadays it is Europeans' responsibility to direct the trajectory of European construction to a historical path. This continent is far from being real but Le Goff believes that it is taking the right itinerary. The Middle Ages are both our youth and that of Europe.

From the beginning of his career Le Goff never changed his ideas and his continuous denying that Charlemagne might have been the father of Europe can be clearly understood when reading his words.

2 Charlemagne presented by Alessandro Barbero

One of the most important biographers of Charlemagne is certainly Alessandro Barbero who took a very deep step into this specific matter, publishing his book *Charlemagne, a father for Europe* back in 2000⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000.

In chapter V the author starts introducing the discussion about the role the king had in the last centuries.

From the XIX century historians never stopped questioning about the matter. But it is after the II World War that a fundamental book appears on the scene: *Mohammed and Charlemagne* by Henri Pirenne. Through this book the point of the discourse has moved toward the survival of the economy and the ancient institutions, things that were not destroyed by the Germanic invasions. It is necessary to remember that German and French intellectuals have always claimed that the Carolingian Empire was composed of French or German citizens. But, as Barbero says, the king could have never been neither German nor French because none of those populations existed at that time. European nations, as we know them, were constituted after the dissolution of his empire. This empire was only formally called *Romanum Imperium* and, in fact, Romans were nothing more than strangers and the name was used to name the inhabitants of Aquitaine.

Charlemagne himself was a Frank and he was very proud and conscious of being it. He never tried to imitate the aspect of roman emperors and even Einhard described his habit of wearing the frank national dress and refusing to use stranger ones, except for two important times where he wore the roman imperial dress: The first happened when Pope Adrian I asked him to while the second when the following pope, Leo III, literally implored him to do the same.

The successes the Franks achieved implied by themselves an ideological contrast with the Roman world. Moreover the national dimension united itself with the religious one: the Franks had any right to guide the Christian world more than the Romans because they never persecuted Christians, something the second did. This contrast lasted for a long time.

The collective identity of Germanic populations came from the memory of the invasions. It is well known today that the franks who lived in Gaul were a minority among the Roman population that absorbed them. But during the

reign of Charlemagne everyone living to the north of Loire considered himself a Frank without keeping any fragment of a Roman origin. Obviously, the linguistic problem did not have anything to do with ethnic identity and it had become just a curiosity the fact that a lot of Franks spoke a Romance language.

From the geographical point of view, the perception of the European area was dominated by the presence of a huge amount of Germanic populations that completely remodelled the space. It is true that the majority of intellectuals was still using the ancient classical geographical categories. Meanwhile the common people knew that the invasions had created a whole new Europe even if they ignored any intellectual sphere related to this matter⁶¹. For those who spoke a Germanic language the horizon was completely different from the classical one. That hypothetical person in Aachen would have known that he was staying in a Frank dominion «Franchonolant». Moving to the south he would have entered the land of the Welsche⁶², «Walholant».

Charlemagne might have felt Frank all his life and might have refused to wear the Roman dresses but when he was making his last will and testament he had the Empire in his mind. He ordered that two-thirds of his treasures were distributed among the twenty one archbishops of the cities he controlled. It is interesting to note how these cities were listed: «Rome, Ravenna, Milan, Cividale, Grado, Cologne, Mainz, Salzburg, Treveri, Sens, Besançon, Lyon, Rouen, Reims, Arles, Wien, Tarantaise, Embrun, Bordeaux, Tours, Bourges». Through this list of cities, the administrative geography of the Roman Empire comes to life not only for the second time, but it also becomes current again.

Another thing to note is that the cities of the Franks, «regnum Francorum», are written after the Italic ones and only to be followed by those of the ancient Gaul. This particular geography depicts a district division that reflects the diffusion of Christianity in ancient times, something that does not correspond

⁶¹ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, pp. 113-119.

⁶² it was the name given to Celts and Romans.

to the extension of those cities at the time of Charlemagne. Some metropolitan provinces became smaller or bigger than they used to be in the past.

By the way the main point is that there is a reason behind this list the king made: There are no Romans or Germans, Franks, Bavarians or Aquitanians; there was the Christian Empire that was Roman at the same time, but it could not be otherwise because Rome was chosen from God as the headquarter of his religion.

2.1 The thesis of Pirenne

In 1937 the European debate over the role of the king takes a new direction thanks to the publication of *Muhammad and Charlemagne*⁶³. This Belgian man, who lived between the Roman and the German worlds, proposed a different point of view. It all starts with the analysis of the commercial traffic and the currency circulation; through them, Pirenne realised that the empire of Charles I did not resemble in any way the Roman Empire. According to him, it was the Arabs who destroyed the unity of the ancient world, built around the *Mare nostrum*, after Muhammad. Following his thesis, the Barbarian invasions were not the main cause of the collapse of Rome and its empire, in fact their economic incidence had been overstated. Europe, as we know it, was taking its form exactly at that time.

This thesis just exposed has been completely abandoned now because historians tend to agree with the assumption that the reason why the Roman Empire came to an end is the invasions. During the high middle ages what changes is the naissance of a new economic space not oriented toward the Mediterranean but to the Continental Europe. The commercial traffic has its main routes in the North sea rather than in the Mediterranean. Even though the

⁶³ The book written in 1937 represents one of the most important works on the study of the Middle Ages.

idea of Pirenne had some limits, it was the nucleus of new paths to be taken: since then the debate focused on the collocation between past and future rather than the composition of the population present in the empire. The point is that historians wonder whether it is more similar to the empire under Constantine the Great and Diocletian or to something different where we can see the beginning of the modern European continent. The first hypothesis, also known as the continuity hypothesis, is followed by the majority of the cultural elite. On the other side the Austrian historian Alfons Dopsch is the main supporter of a different line, a line linking the era of Charlemagne to that of Gaius Julius Caesar. But the truth is that this kind of thinking does not prevail over the other one. There is a third path that is really gaining the majority of consensus: there is a Late Antiquity whose starting point is positioned between the III and the IV centuries during the eras of the Diocletian's Reforms and the advent of Christianity. But even if we consider the other hypothesis it is possible to find a link with the ideas proposed by Pirenne and in particular the image of a Carolingian Europe which is completely separated from the Mediterranean and that has no relations with Africa and the Orient. It should be clear, if we keep in mind this picture, that the Europe of Charlemagne has nothing in common with the Mediterranean surrounded by the Roman Empire of Constantine and Diocletian. In other words the crack that some historians placed around the III-IV century has now moved forward, even though the reason behind this is the slow destruction of the public finances followed by the Germanic invasions. Another reason is certainly the new orientation of commercial traffics towards Northern Europe that had its peak during the reign of Charles I.

2.2 The hyper-Romanists

Some scholars, whom their adversaries call hyper-Romanists⁶⁴, have always tried to demonstrate that the roman tax system did survive to the Barbarian invasions and continued to be used in the reign of the Franks and then in the Carolingian one without facing any substantial change. They believed that all the richness that the Frankish kings confiscated and then redistributed to the powerful elite and to the Churches did not consist of the property of soil but of its proceeds. Unfortunately the study of the hyper-Romanists has lost a lot of credibility because it seems driven more by their will than by real facts proving this theory.

A different point of view has been proposed by the researcher and historian Guy Bois. He was very critical of the theory proposed before and introduced a new interpretation of the period around the XI century. The nucleus of his thesis is that the Europe of Charlemagne was not very different, on a social and productive sphere, from the ancient political territory it used to be during the control of the Romans.

The author focuses then on the condition of the slaves; In fact, at the time of Charlemagne these people were more similar to a roman slave from a juridical perspective.

To be honest, historians have already proved this thesis to be wrong. It is not possible to compare the condition of those slaves because there are clear historical details and information that underline a totally different mode of production, integration and organisation. Carolingian slave possessed a property house, did have a wife and children, but most importantly, they worked close to free works and smallholders. Given all these aspect it is, nonetheless, undeniable that Bois' thesis brought the majority of the historians

⁶⁴ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, pp. 124-127.

to realise that the principal matter is a society undergoing a complete transformation.

2.3 A new geography

What need to be focused now is the space that the king created and where he had to move his steps; if we do this it is impossible not to see that, through the Frankish hegemony, the space we are presenting is becoming the Europe that we know. Even though there were a lot of limits and imperfections in the thesis proposed by Pirenne, it is undeniable that the Roman Empire was concentrated mostly on the Mediterranean area; this area did cover a space from Africa and Europe to Asia, a space that is normally called *Mare nostrum*⁶⁵. On the contrary the empire of Charlemagne was facing a totally different horizon: it was a continental reality where the boundaries and the national territories of modern Europe were acquiring their first shape.

The notion of West dates back to the late Roman empire when its provinces facing the famous Barbarian invasions were unified into a new entity, despite their long independent history. This unification means that the laws, the government institutions, the economy rules, all created inside the territory of Gaul, were extended to the entire European area. Therefore this step did not just involved the obedience to a unique emperor that could control such a vast extension of land. It was certainly a very slow process with its peak at Christmas day of the year 800 and that could have been perceived by the Frankish kings' habit of handling a strict hegemony on their territories and populations. The coronation of Charles I was terribly meaningful because it opened the doors to a new political world that remains familiar to the new generations even though so many centuries have passed since then; a Nordic,

⁶⁵ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, p. 126.

Europe, influenced by a Latin and a Germanic soul, that keeps the Mediterranean regions at a distance. It is no coincidence that Brussels is the centre and nucleus of what today is the European Union. At the same time, it should not surprise anyone that the priest Catwulfo back in 775 wrote to Charles to announce him that God had chosen him for seating on the throne of Europe and that in 799, an unknown poet of Paderborn referred to the king as «Rex Pater Europæ», the father of Europe.

2.4 The organisation of European society under Charlemagne: the economic situation

In order to demonstrate whether this person can be considered a father of the modern European Union we have to focus on the various elements that constituted its reign. In particular, the investigation should consider the economy, the organization of the geographical territory only to end with a fundamental part of this research: the strong relationship between Charlemagne and the Christian church. The first point to be analysed is the economy with a detailed description of the farming activities, the local and global exchanges and so forth.

According to the already mentioned theory of Henry Pirenne, as soon as the Barbarian invasions deprived the West of its commercial routes on the Mediterranean, it regressed to a purely farm economy. This particular economy was apparently characterized by self-consumption and the almost total absence of exchanges. This theory has always had a lot of followers among the historians of the last decades. In 1981 the great medievalist Robert Fossier said that the technique was non-existent, the land was left abandoned, villages were barely stable, there were a few surpluses that only some privileged people could exchange and the productive structure was

inefficient⁶⁶. Despite those words, Fossier recognized that there were some positive elements and, in fact, he said that the number of people was growing along with a movement of money and a strengthening of will.

The economy was certainly dominated by agriculture and the majority of the population was made of peasants. Some of these were yeomen with their own house and their own piece of land; we do possess very little information of them but it is likely that this category lives a situation of self-consumption. The big landownership has a totally different role, in fact, they have available most of the peasants. These companies are no longer ancient latifundium and they have a new kind of organization that historians define Manorialism: the objective of this system was the satisfaction of the owner's nutrition, that was frequently a cloister or the king. The big companies had the chance to produce surpluses and these were exchanged.

In this commercial activity, big fiscal holdings are favoured by the geographical situation. Even though the European continent was unable to trade through the Mediterranean under the Franks, it did not employ self-consumption but re-oriented its commercial flows toward the North and the East. An example of these new traffics is the authorisation given to the Black Monks to substitute oil with butter and lard in 817. It had become impossible to find olive oil because of its scarceness. The Mediterranean was sacrificed to an irrelevant role while the North sea gained a new significant position but this did not mean that the volume of goods exchanged decreased. On the river basins of Neustria and Austrasia and along Flemish and Frisian coasts the market places and the commercial hubs, protected by the law and where the *negotiators* arrived, multiplied. The merchants from North, Anglo-Saxons, Frisians and Scandinavians did sell fish, cheese, textiles, furs and slaves; in return they bought wheat, wine, weapons and crockery. If the ancient Mediterranean ports like Marseille suffer, and the traffic alongside the Rhine

⁶⁶ Robert Fossier, *Il tempo delle crisi. Storia del medioevo*. Einaudi editore, 1987.

becomes thin, new exchange centres like Rouen, Quentovic and Dorestad, receive a totally new fame.

As it was said before, the dominion of the big manor meant a great pressure from which the birth of a vast network of fresh urban centres, the interest of the royal government for the surveillance of streets and rivers and the imposition of a monetary reform depended. This coin, whose circulation should have been guaranteed, had to be uniform and manoeuvrable all over the empire. As Giuseppe Petralia wrote, the monetary aspect, the legislative apparatus and the unifying policy of Charlemagne all seem the starting point of late Middle Age and of modern Europe.

2.5 Manorialism: the situation in the rural area

The emperor, the big cloisters, the bishops and the aristocratic families owned vast areas of land that were worked by slaves, freedmen and tenants. These properties were frequently scattered among an immense zone that coincided with the empire in the case of the emperor. For organisational reasons, these lands were gathered together into business complexes called *curtes* or *villae*, each controlled by a land agent. This means that a big landowner had a lot of these *villae*. The *villa* was different from the ancient *latifundium* for two aspects. First, it was not a geographically compact property, with extensions of cornfields and olive tree groves, possessed by the same owner, but it was a gathering of non contiguous fields, grazing lands and thickets. As long as the big property grew, absorbing the neighbouring smallholding, it might happen that, in one or some farming villages, the majority of land belonged to one person. The *fisci*⁶⁷, big state-owned companies, assumed the above mentioned conformation.

⁶⁷ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, p. 305.

The second difference between the *curtes* and the ancient *latifundium* is that the owner did not have enough slaves to work on its entire extension. The inventories of cloistered properties, the so called polyptych, made at the time of Charlemagne, demonstrate that less than half of workers were slaves. What we are considering here are the countermeasures adopted by the owners rather than the reduction of slaves; these were the decision to preserve under their own organisation only a small part of the company, that would have been worked through the help of the slaves, while having the rest of their small farms subdivided. Every small farm was given to a farming family that had, in return, a series of obligations to conduct toward the owner. The payment of a rent was the least important.

All this signified the birth of the typical bipartite organisation that was the main element of the *Curtis*. Any *villa* includes a part of lands cultivated for the owner's profit and another divided among different authorities that could work on that piece of territory independently. The first part was called *dominicum* or *pars dominica*, literally the part of the owner, while the second had the name *massaricium* or *pars massaricia*, that came from the term *massario* which indicated the employed peasant who lived on the acreage. At the time of Charlemagne the part of land subdivided into small farms was bigger than the territory run directly by the owner. Sometimes the first grew at the expense of the second. This growth was the result of a precise political project that wanted to transform slaves into independent cultivators on a piece of land. Their work was probably more productive with that kind of incentive. Moreover, the law forced the master to permit his slaves to marry and to respect those unions. Finally, religion encouraged the liberation of the slaves. The very nature of the *villa* suggested that the majority of it be converted into rental units whose name was *mansus*, or farmhouse in Italy. The term *mansus* indicated the dwelling house and the territories managed by one or more farming families. It was normal that a medium or a smallholder, like those mentioned in Charlemagne's Capitulary, had just one, two or three *mansus*

given to an equal number of cultivators. It is very likely that the name *mansus* was given even to the house and the company of a free peasant that worked his lands on his own. It may be possible that the same word indicated only an administrative concept with any geographical coherence. In many cases the *mansus* represented what we call a small farm, that is an amount of portions of land contiguous cultivated by one or more families living inside an isolated house. The techniques of measurement and accounting were so deficient that the *mansus* was considered by the rulers of the empire as the most useful unit of measure of land ownership and, therefore, of richness. To make it clear we can assume that the *mansus* had become even a unit of fiscal distribution.

There is another reason that explains why the bipartite model spread everywhere. Peasant work was subject to seasonal rhythms; a landowner who wanted to cultivate extensively a vast piece of fields needed a lot of labour during the harvesting or the haymaking season. It could have been convenient to maintain, on the manor, the bare minimum of *prebendarii*, the slaves that ate the owner's bread and that had to be fed all year, and have part of the harvesting done by the tenants during the hardest periods of work. At the same time, instead of utilising its own plough, wagons and oxen, the owner could have imposed his tenants to make him available that material when the need was strong due to the ploughing or the transportation of the products to the markets or to the residence of the master. Therefore, the peasants who occupied a *mansus* undertook the task of giving some working days: the *corvées*. These performances substituted the need of salaried labour, a safe belt in other periods of time but useless during the era of Charlemagne because it was rarely used; the fact is that money in circulation was scarce and the empire was scarcely populated.

The farmers, who saw their dependence from the master reinforced, were forced through an hereditary contract to work on the fields of the big landowner. Even if they were born free, they were, nonetheless, a property of that person but in a different way from the slaves. Manumission was a

different situation in which a slave was hereditarily destined to remain a servant of a particular person or family and that could not marry at all⁶⁸.

The *villae* could have different dimensions, from a few hundred hectares to even more than two thousands. But the most frequent dimension was about one or two thousand hectares. As much as the dimension the other factor that could change was the number of people working in that places. They could span from ten to a hundred families. One of the biggest fiscal companies in Italy was located at Bene Vagienna and had at its disposal over three thousand and three hundred workers and if we count even wives and children the number rises to fifteen thousand. These numbers were not fixed. A year of starvation, illnesses and wars in the marginal lands could destroy entire families and it was not easy to find other substitutes, in fact it is very likely to find in history books the word *absi* which indicates the uninhabited lands. The presence of these empty *mansi* could be the effect of a reorganization or a tillage of new lands where it was not possible to cultivate or build.

Historians long believed that all the *villae* had the same kind of organization. Close to the country house, where the land agent lived and that represented the control centre of the company, there were a few silos and barns, stables, warehouses, vegetable gardens, henhouses, fish farms, rooms for cheese production, meat brining, the preparation of beer and laboratories for clothes weaving. The truth is that it is clear how different was the organisation that the land agent imposed to its labour and its territories if he had to host the master the following winter, to prepare apparatus for the army, to sell his products at the market and send the money obtained to the owner. The *villa* was certainly managed in a very independent way but it was still part of a bigger productive circuit. In the case of the big landownership, a land agent could have several *villae* under his control. The weather was one of the main factors that influenced the kind of cultivation that could be found at a company. Grain

⁶⁸ Hornblower & Spawforth. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1996. pp. 334, 609.

growth was conducted in various extended fields of about a hundred or two hundred hectares and its task was the creation of reserves rather than the immediate use. The most precious cultivations were the rye and wheat while in the big companies of northern France the production was oriented toward barley and another cereal that has almost disappeared today: the spelt. The reason behind this frequent use of those cereals was that they are easily conservable. During the Roman Empire the warehouses of the garrisons located along the *limes* were covered with spelt. The only reason that might explain this big amount of a cereal like this is the willingness to amass long-lasting provisions for the population and the army, given that nobles and monks were not used to consume it.

2.6 Did an exchange economy exist?

As already mentioned before, there were a few historians that affirmed the non existence of a economic network in the period under analysis. The idea that drove this reasoning is the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 d.C. and the strange belief that the loss of a market in the Mediterranean had completely destroyed any commercial link. Through this part, we shall see the modern economic aspects of the “new” empire as long as some of the thing the “old” empire left. The European union has a wide developed network that permits the movements of products all over the union and this is an aspect that might be seen here.

The ancient roman cities had no real value during the era of Charlemagne. Some of them were still relevant but the number was around a hundred, of which just two, Rome and Pavia, are located in Italy. The new coastal commercial centres were much more important because they had gained a fundamental role; they became meeting places, centres of commercial traffics

and river and sea ports with urban characteristics. But their proliferation was the result of an economic growth that took place in the rural area. It was in the farmlands that a certain number of people slowly increased and that a serious endeavour of deforestation and drying of swamps happened to let new lands be cultivated. It was in the same places that the circulation of currency took place and where market forums multiplied. In these fields people worked, produced, consumed, but above all stockpiled and reinvested more than commonly believed; this reorientation of the organisation of work was driven by the big cloistered property. There are still documents containing information about inventories and distributions. The abbots had a very clear idea of what the organisation of their properties should have been, in fact, they were not happy of just consuming the surpluses obtained by the local agents. Their objective was not the research of profits and they were not businessmen⁶⁹. But the Rule forced them to feed and clothe their monks, the charity dictated them to help the poor and the king ordered them to host the pilgrims or himself or his guests. At the same time, it happened when the king ordered them to send him a free convoy of wagons containing any possible thing or when he needed some well equipped knights. To this purpose it was necessary to dispose of warehouses full of wheat, cellars with wine, beer, olive oil, pantries covered with salt and lard, woodshed with stumps and herds of cows and horses; all these things should have arrive to the monastery from a distance and in big numbers. Therefore, it was not enough to live only with one's own products; it was essential to amass and redistribute, to organise and reinvest. The norm was an evaluation of the consumption necessary to the monastic community and an advanced allocation of the procurements among the rural companies possessed.

The functioning of the system required the ability to plan the transportation of the stuff from a distance, by land or sea. The abbots decided some itineraries

⁶⁹ Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, pp. 314-315.

through which the convoys could pass, remaining in areas owned by the cloister. They also equipped boats of different types, supply the companies with harbour structures, redirect the labour onto postal and transportation services and ask the king to guarantee the safety of the routes and to exonerate the agents of the abbey from payment of tolls and market taxes.

It is interesting to see the list of the monasteries that desperately try to acquire an inn at the big port of Quentovic, or at least a nearby property that could be used as a base for their traffics: Saint Vaast, Saint Riquier; Saint Bertin, Saint Germain-des-Prés. Those traffics were not just buying and selling of products because even the barter was involved.

Alcuin⁷⁰, an abbot of the monastery of Ferrières, received from Charlemagne a property located at the peat swamp forests of the Flemish coast; it was at Saint Josse-sur-Mer not far from Quentovic. The cloister could provide itself with wax, clothes, legumes, cheese and conserved fish and it was also able to respect the mandate of the emperor about the hospitality. After the death of the king one of his successors reclaimed the gift and the new abbot Lupo⁷¹ was totally unable to nourish and clothe the monks. The correspondence of this abbot contains a lot of disgusted references about the necessity of acquiring legumes, wheat and beer for the entire community, at the Orleans market. Therefore, there was a market, money circulated and there were produce. But the abbot was not satisfied because it was not how a well organised economy functioned. The purchase of products with the use of currency was a sort of scandal, an act that would have impoverished the cloister in the long run. Even the procurements that, in the past, derived from Saint Josse-sur-Mer were bought at the market of Quentovic. But there is a different logic here: the monastic property prepared on a that place was able to generate surpluses and

⁷⁰ Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*, 816/833.

⁷¹ It is unknown any precise detail about when Einhard composed his biography of Charlemagne, but the first reference to the book can be found in a letter that Lupus sent to Einhard and which is dated to the mid-ninth century.

to exchange them at the market without using money⁷². It was quite natural to resort to a system of gifts and counter-gifts in order to compensate for the deficiencies of the market and the scarceness of numbers.

The correspondence of Lupo was full of requests to other people and in all those cases there was no mention of a payment. This system may result a bit primitive but it worked redoubling the economic exchanges of a strong net of social obligations.

At the time of Charlemagne's economic policy, money represented a subsidiary means. Self-sufficiency, rather than profit, was the ideal situation for the rich. Even though currency was marginal and rare, it was nonetheless necessary to buy those hard to find things at the market or to solve fiscal situations. The most prudent abbots tried to amass as much products as possible to be prepared for bad seasons and so selling their wheat and wine surpluses. At the same time, the land agents were authorised to sell their livestock, the flour obtained from the miller and the products of their vegetable garden. When Louis the Pious ordered that the tithes owed to the church would have been paid in kind and added that the bishops could collect cash, he demonstrated an understanding for the economic value of coins. The preference for coins was due to its commodity: it travelled faster than foodstuffs. Moreover, cloisters tended to request cash payments to peasants living faraway. The pressure the abbots made on peasants played an important role in forcing them to sell a part of their products in order to procure they dozen of silver coins they had to give to the monastery every year. Not even the peasants were out of the market but even in their case it is necessary to distinguish between self-sufficiency and its limited. If we analyse the monastic holdings, it is evident that the effective capacity of peasants to nourish themselves with the products offered by their lands varied from family to family and from village to village. This is the reason why the exchanges were

⁷² Alessandro Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 2000, pp. 317-318.

frequent between people inside the same village and between nearby villages. We cannot exclude the chance that a rich peasant, who lived close to a navigable river, could exchange his surpluses faraway from home. Charlemagne had to prohibit his workers to spend their time at the markets and this means that they were places full of people who bought anything they could. If local exchanges were organised directly by the peasants, those involving a much bigger distance were managed by merchants, people who earned from the commerce. In some areas of the empire this category of people constituted a rich and influent group; For example, in Italy the Po river offered a natural path for the salt of the Adriatic and for the wools bought by Venetian merchants. But the territory that had the biggest concentration of merchants was the coast of the North sea where the Frisians lived. Even though the country had just recently been converted to Christianity it was already integrating itself inside the *regnum Francorum*. In order to be transported toward the northern markets, the goods coming from the hinterland had to be embarked and the only population who had the right know-how to do this were the Frisians.

The scarce import of luxuries that arrived in France from the oriental markets were managed by the Jews who lived in the cities along the Rhône. They did not resort to sea import but they used some links they had on the part of Spain controlled by the Muslims. Under the reign of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious the Jewish merchants flourished thanks to their ability to supply the court with wine, spices and wools and so they received a lot of privileges in return. The exports toward the land of oriental Europe are less known. Those areas were inhabited by the Slavs and the Eurasian Avars who were becoming more and more important due to the victorious campaigns of the emperor. These offensives forced those populations to submit themselves. In 805, while preparing an attack against some Slavs, Charlemagne published some precise restrictions to the traders who operated in that particular sector.

The protection of those who were involved in the international commerce was a duty of the king. This means that he was benevolent toward those who undertook long travels to exchange to a lot of distant places and he even encouraged those activities. There is another category who is not as famous as the great traders: local merchants. An Hagiographer of the VIII century tell us about a man whose only richness consisted of a donkey that helped him travelling to buy products in a city only to sell them, at a higher price, in a different one. We have much more knowledge about those merchants who worked for cloisters, under the protection of the monks. Those people benefited from this situation and they had in fact the same tax exemption that the king gave to monastic communities and their agents. In 775, during a renewal of a privilege to the abbey of Saint Denis, Charlemagne specified that the exemption from taxes worked for all foodstuffs belonging to the abbey.

The monks had always held a big exhibition during the celebration of Saint Denis every 9 of October. That day negotiators came from any country but the majority of them were people from the North, Anglo-Saxons and Frisians, who bought wine that could be exported to their countries; and this generated a circular movement of inland navigations animating the whole Parisian basin. The abbey itself was a wine producer and had a determinant role in organising and monitoring the exhibition. The popularity of this event or of maritime and emporiums like Rouen, Orleans, Dorestad and Quentovic is related to a weakness of traffics: masses of negotiators and buyers filled those places because it was frequently impossible to find certain products elsewhere.

2.7 The direct and indirect intervention of the king in the economic system: an example of unified central regulation

The prosperity of the economy was partly due to the actions of the king. Some of these actions were indirect but nonetheless they bore fruits: the necessity to put at Charlemagne's disposal the economic resources of the Christian church. In brief, the delegates sent by the court exercised some pressures to have ecclesiastical properties inserted in lists of inventories and they also convinced bishops and abbots of the necessity to organise in fixed forms the management of their lands; this meant a generalisation of Manorialism. The same importance share the direct interventions. At times they were general dispositions whose task was the control of commercial activities in order to protect consumers. An example of this was the prohibition of nocturnal commerce of gold and silver crockery, jewels, slaves, horses and livestock because there was the risk that consumers could have been deceived. When the sun disappeared it was only possible to sell provisions and hay to travellers at local inns. Some of the interventions of Charlemagne regarded an ample and complex planning and a serious intrusion in the most delicate mechanisms of economy; it is the case of the reform of weights and measures, currency and food ration policy.

One of the constant worries of Charlemagne was the adaptation of weights and measures to a unique standard in his whole empire. The reason behind this was the guarantee that no one would have been deceived again. But this kind of action meant an intrusion into the economy with the aim of controlling and managing. When Pepin was mayor of the palace he had ordered that every bishop controlled the weights and measures used at the local markets. His son went even beyond and imposed the adoption of this rule in any single part of his reign. It might be very likely that he was thinking about it in 787. The aim of this regulation was the unification of food habits of all the monks living in

the thousand abbeys located in his territories; but then Charlemagne opened .this action to a bigger plan. By 794 a new capacity measure was introduced and it worked for liquids and solids; that means wine and cereals: the public almud⁷³ should have been distinguished from the older one. That year, the Council of Frankfurt decided the fixed prices of the market ordering that anyone used this measure as the only one. The new almud should have been wider. The success of this reform is far from being certain. Charlemagne ordered to all his managers of fiscal properties to keep one of the new almuds in any house and to use only that kind of measurement. But the complaints about the difference of this new form with the older one grew and the old methods were never completely abandoned. This is clear because the king imposed its use several times. The resistance to change and the practical difficulties to its fulfilment were about to destroy of the most ambitious efforts made by the Carolingian kings. It will be necessary the help of Napoleon and his decimal system in order to have weights and measures imposed in whole Europe.

2.8 The currency

In the picture of standardisation of weights and measures we have to insert the monetary reform, a mixture of legislative interventions due first to Pepin and then retaken by Charlemagne. The emperor was able to continue and increase the political directives began by his father but in a more and systematic way. The main objective of the reform was the imposition of a monometallic standard that required the use of a single kind of silver coin in commerce instead of the bimetallic standard used by the Roman Empire. The reform might seem the consequence of a braking or a debacle of the

⁷³ An ancient unit of measurement that was already used during roman times and whose exact value depends from area to area.

circulating currency and the commercial exchanges; this was in fact the thesis of Henri Pirenne. By the way, under the Merovingian the circulation of a gold coin was never interrupted. The survival of gold coinage was not the sign of a greater economic activity. For the majority of the VII century Frankish kings had always coined only a gold coin completely avoiding the silver coinage. This meant that the smallest unit in circulation was the gold *Tremissis* with the weight of 1,51 grams and with a value that could permit the sustenance of a person for several months. It was certainly not a good time for small traffics. When the coinage and circulation of a new silver coin started, the denier, this novelty did not become the sign of a crisis but a retake of commerce instead. The legislative interventions of Pepin and, then, of Charlemagne not only encouraged and supervised the coinage of silver diners but also saw the potential of unification contained in this new coin. The reform they made imposed in the entire occidental Europe the adoption of a unique monetary system whose destiny was its survival until the French Revolution and even the Great Britain of 1970. There are even some people who assume that the coin just created might have been a sort of Charlemagne's «protoeuro». The most fundamental part of this new system was the decision to coin the diners with a fixed tax and this rule should have been followed by any single mint; from a *libra*⁷⁴ it should have been coined 240 diners. Silver money had to be the only kind of legal tender coined in the empire even though multiples of diners were used during transactions. These multiples were not a real currency but just an artificial sum that was useful when purchasing: the *solidus* was an ancient coin of the Roman Empire that, now, acquired a value of twelve diners and the *lira* whose value became 240 diners or 20 *solidi*⁷⁵. But the most important regulation imposed by the king in the 890s was the increase of the weight of currency in general and that of *lira* in particular. Until then money weighed around 1,3 grams that is the same weight of 20 barely grains.

⁷⁴ An ancient roman unit of measure.

⁷⁵ The *solidus* was an ancient roman coin made of gold introduced in 312 A.D. by the emperor Constantine I.

Charlemagne decided to move to a system based on wheat grain and established that silver money should have weighed as much as 32 wheat grains that is 1,7 grams. Given the fact 240 diners were coined from a *libra*, this meant a total modification of the same value of the *libra* whose weight was increased to 408 grams. The by-product of this action was that the coins of the king, circulating in the empire, became heavier and much more appreciated than those of his predecessors.

But the reform had another aim: the reclaiming of the coinage monopoly in favour of the royal mints. This happened after centuries of decentralisation where a multitude of minters, at the service of cloisters especially, had coined currency without any political control. The name of the king substituted the brand of the minter on coins. From now on, it was the king, and not the manufacturer, who guaranteed the good quality of the currency. The number of authorised mints was drastically reduced and even those cloisters that kept the privilege of coining had the duty to adapt their activity to the new royal coinage and not to print their name on the money they produced. The whole empire would have seen the circulation of a unique currency model and local authorities, both laic and ecclesiastical, had to control that anyone accepted this kind of coin as a means of payment. Charlemagne clearly gave his empire a homogeneous instrument that could guarantee the quality of money and its full circulation among the boundaries of his territories. Despite being guaranteed by the image and the name of the emperor, the new currency was not the best means through which exchanging with the Orient. And this confirms the new asset of commercial traffics. The Mediterranean lines did have no importance at all and the most relevant commerce was the one taking place with the North sea where Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavian merchants were truly happy of accepting the silver coins of Charlemagne. This is so true that a lot of kings started imitating the work of the emperor in their own mints. The choice of Charlemagne for monometallism did not mean that gold coins were not circulating in the areas open to traffics with the Mediterranean. In

the bed of river Rhine, close to Bologna, the luggage of a merchant from southern Italy, that drowned while crossing the river, was found. In his bag there were only gold coins. Bad gold coins were gladly given to northern merchants; they were an imitation of the gold medallions of Charlemagne produced for people who represented the king during political events.

By the way it is important to underline that despite the Carolingian reform the West remained deprived of a small unit of money that could be useful during everyday exchanges. Silver coins were the smallest unit in circulation and in some areas of the empire it was even the only one; and in 794 its value corresponded to the price of 12 wheat breads or 15 rye breads. It is not really clear how someone could buy a single piece of bread. A possible answer is that everyone bought flour sacks to prepare their own breads and paying the baker with a percentage of that flour. Even those who did not cultivate a piece of land followed this rule. Those who were used to go to the market to buy or sell a chicken or a dozen eggs did it relying on the confidence for the other person, in general. The seller kept an account of people who still had to pay him and pretended to be paid periodically.

3 Lucien Febvre

The historian Lucien Febvre held a course around 1944 at the Collège in Paris where he discussed about the role Charlemagne had in forming the idea of Europe. The words he gave in that occasion have been collected in an essay that clarifies the role that the King had taken in the middle ages.

His considerations start with a comparison of two people in a different time, one person living in the Roman Empire and the other during the Holy Roman Empire⁷⁶:

⁷⁶Lucien Febvre, *Europa. Storia di una civiltà*, Roma, Donzelli editore, 1999, pp.76-77.

The first thing we need to do is taking an inhabitant of Lugudum (Lion) travelling in the IV century. That person can certainly feel at home in Rome, in Gadès, in Baetica but also when he goes to Carthage. If he is a member of the aristocracy he may possess some properties in Greece or in Asia minor. At the same time, we cannot define him an intrusive when he finds himself among the cultural elite of Antioch or Alexandria. But once he moves over the Rhine or the Danube he can feel lost. The second thing we now have to do is observing a person from the same city travelling in the IX century. The political scenario has changed completely and that person does not feel any more at home when he goes to Carthage, whose ruins now belong to the Arabs, enemies of the Christians. Equally, he is not at home in Gadès which has become part of the Caliphate of Córdoba. The same situation happens when that person moves to Athens, Constantinople and Nicene. In Ravenna he find himself between those separatists who speak Greek and whose mores differ profoundly from his own habits. In Alexandria he has to confront the Arabs again. But there is a substantial difference now. In Münster, in Osnabrük, in Bremen on the Weser, in Magdeburg on the Elbe, in Würzburg on the Main, are all places where his home is even though he cannot speak the local language, the vulgar language of the inhabitants of those territories. But he can, nonetheless, talk to the clerics that speak Latin. He can discuss with him about literary and philosophical masterpieces, all materials that belong to his cultural background. At the same time, attending a mass in Magdeburg or in Lion has no difference because the ritual does not undergo any changes. These examples have the aim of instructing us about a particular characteristic: the entrance of the Nordic elements into Europe.

After a few lines the author poses an interesting question: Given the existence two people, who is the European one⁷⁷? The one of the IV century or the one of the IX century? From our point of view, It is clearly the one living in the IX

⁷⁷ Lucien Febvre, *Europa. Storia di una civiltà*, Roma, Donzelli Editore, 1999, p. 81.

century, the one living on the side of the Rhin that the Carolingian Empire has reunited with the other, thereby creating a common extensive administrative, political and religious creature that is now unified. This creation will not last forever but it lasts many centuries.

Then it is possible to say that Charlemagne has not just inherited the Roman Empire as many people have been saying for a long time. The Carolingian Empire is not just the retake of Rome. The Carolingian Empire is the first politic form of a new world, a world that does not end with the Rhine and the Danube anymore, a world that assimilates, in its cultural and political unit, the ever growing space of a thing that ceases to be Germany only to become Alemania.

Lucien Febvre affirms that someone might ask whether the Carolingian Europe is modern Europe. The starting point of this discussion is a “small” consideration: the space occupied by the Carolingian Empire. Despite being really vast, the borders of the empire stretched from the Pyrenees to the Elbe, from the Frisian islands to Lombardy and Tuscany, from the marches of Brittany⁷⁸ to the oriental march, the *Ost-Mark* that would become Austria. It is essentially focused on the territories of the Rhine and the Rhône, together under the name of Lotharingia, that constitute, along with a part of Italy, the southern part of an empire gathering together what would have become France and Germany in the future. But we have to pay attention to this delicate point because it exactly the same extension of the Roman Church and outside this places live the followers of Muhammad. At the same time Slavics and Heathens, who invaded the big level ground of northern Europe repelling Germanics and Finns and that Charlemagne tried to expel, were outside. The same condition shared Greeks, Byzantines and the Orthodox who tried to get closer to the Patriarch of Constantinople in order to oppose him to the Pope. This is the fact that explains the coronation of Charlemagne the year 800.

⁷⁸ Brittany and Great Britain are excluded from this space.

Therefore the Carolingian Europe is not our Europe because ours is much more extended. According to Febvre there is much more to say to those people who believe that what matters is not the extension but that this Carolingian Europe is the essence of our Europe. We are Europeans of 1944 and the difference with the inhabitant of Lyon of the IX century, or that of the IV century, is that we feel at home when reaching Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia. We are at home in the same way the Lyonnais of the IV century felt at home when going to Cirta or Utica. At the same time we are at home at Alexandria or at Cairo and this means that we have become Mediterranean again, we have remade the Roman empire. But it cannot be seen this way: the Empire was peace and unity. Alexandria and Cairo or, on the other side, Casablanca and Rabat are European cities but not cities of Europe. They have become Europeans a little time ago but our grandparents would have considered them trembling and hostile to their civilisation, ready for war. It is the same way we see the rural areas of the African world surrounding the cities; hostile places where revolutions happen any single day and that cannot be put under control. As he said, the great historical importance of Charlemagne's empire was that it can certainly be considered the anticipation of the historical Europe, the Europe different from the Roman Empire, from its internal as well as external elements; it is the same Charlemagne that attributed the title *magnus* to himself and that saw history recognising him a title so strongly that it was attached to his name: *Carolus Magnus*. It's an honour that was not give neither to Caesar nor to Napoleon, the only two men that benefit, along with him, from an unprecedented glory. And if someone says that Caesar saw his name becoming synonym of emperor in Germanic territories, *Kaiser*⁷⁹, then it is possible to argue that this honour was reserved even to Charles I; in Slavic and Hungarian languages the common name for a king is *Carol*, *kirol*, *krol*. If we abandon the external and formal point of the state and assume the internal one we can see the clear contrast between the Carolingian and the

⁷⁹ The word Kaiser derives exactly from the name Caesar.

Roman empires and the distinguishable signs of the appearance of Europe at the time the king reigned. Some of those features can still be seen in the Europe that existed from the IX to the XIX centuries. Some of these need to be seen. The Carolingian Empire is a terrestrial, continental dominion but no longer maritime and the consequence is that it is not oriented towards a well frequented, crawling, active and radiating big sea. This empire is a rural empire, full of peasants and country rustics. There is nothing in common with that Mediterranean made of societies of mountain people and sailors who live in particular small groups and that find their natural place and expression in the islands of the Aegean sea: small and archaic worlds, primitive in customs and traditions, clothes, isolated and irreducible; they are small unstable words always under a situation of hunger where pirates and corsairs force them to build defensive strongholds. This is the life on the islands, the Mediterranean life where villages are sequences of continental islands and remind us of oasis. This kind of life underlines the needs of having a lot of different ports: from the small town port of fishermen to the big Mediterranean ports of the big cities located around the sea with its captains, merchants and carpenters. All of this circumstances have nothing in common with the rural, terrestrial and hard life of the countryside, the life of the populations living in the Carolingian Empire. These are the inhabitants of the historical Europe. Peasantry is one of the constituting elements of the Europe we experience every day. The other element is constituted by the bourgeoisie which is not even comparable to the numerous populations of the Mediterranean world as much as European cities are not comparable with Mediterranean cities.

City and countryside, peasants and bourgeoisie; this is the social story of old Europe up to the XIX centuries, until the advent of our European world, the world of machinery and industry. In France we can clearly see two different worlds: the countryside and the cities are two different spheres that live at extremely close distance. By moving towards the Germany of the XVI century we can see the society of princes and lords that keep peasants and workers

under a condition of subjection through the appliance of the rural right, which is totally different from the right of the city. On the other side the society of the city, the timeless enemy of the princes. Febvre wondered when this peasantry gained ground as economic, social and political forces in Europe. The answer is that it did it during Carolingian times when the *Signoria* was at its highest extension. The *Signoria* was a great element of the European history; it was both a territory and a group of people, a territory organised to the advantage of a lord so that the proceeds could go to one person; and also a well organised group of people that recognised the lord as a leader. This *Signoria* was a close world and part of a very close economy. It is not a case that this system developed everywhere when the Mediterranean closes its doors to the Europeans and commercial ports like Marseille are forced to inaction. Do jobs that work for export block? This kind of expression has lost all of its sense. It is now that a close economy regime takes place that has no escape and that belongs to the noble regime, known as feudal regime.

Every time we are in front of one of those great institutions standing at the base of Europe and the European life, we are guided backward to the times of Charlemagne; we are connected with the Carolingian Empire that was and still is, after all the said and done, the prefiguration of the mature Europe of the XVIII and XIX centuries, as much as the Roman Empire was the deep political expression of a unified and peaceful Mediterranean world. This passage from a Roman Empire to a Carolingian type of Europe has determined the creation of a total new set of inventions that Mediterranean populations could not build or simply did not want to build; but they were all realised in northern European valleys. To this purpose it might be useful to read the work of the general Lefebvre des Noëttes⁸⁰ who showed us the revolution occurring in the agricultural field; there was, in fact, a total transformation of the instruments used on animal to have them carry heavy wagons or plough a field. Their force was limited by the system of cables that linked them with the

⁸⁰ He was a French historian who fought in the French army at the end of the XIX century.

wagon; they were fastened on the neck and this attachment almost strangled the animal without letting it to use its entire strength. The new attachment on the shoulders of the animal, along with some new inventions that appeared in the Carolingian era, like stirrups, saddle and the shoeing of the horse, are all things that could not have affected the Roman Empire but that did it with the Carolingian one. The reason behind this is the geographical aspect of this amount of territories. Why? Febvre let us know that the Mediterranean world made large use of beasts of burden and not of animal-powered transport because those areas are full of dangerous, pebbly and precipitous mountains. There, the most used animals were horses, mules, donkeys and not wagons. Then the new comers arrived in the X century when the European area was exiting the Mediterranean one and moving toward the north, entering the great valleys of the Atlantic France and of Germany. Those areas were perfect for the use of animals for transportation.

It is now time to introduce another important discovery : the water mill. Was it a new invention? We can observe the irregularity of Mediterranean rivers. The kind of work at a Burgundy mill is much more continuous, regular and interesting than what happens in a mill of Provence. For the same reasons, the Mediterranean world did not know the Lock while the Nordic world did. There are just too few navigable rivers in the Mediterranean and the invention of the lock could only affect Atlantic rivers and ports. Another invention of that time is the domestic fireplace. According to Lefebvre des Noëttes it was necessary that the transportation of big amounts of wood became possible in order to have the first fireplaces lit. In the Mediterranean it was harder to find the wood rather than to transport it. Therefore, this invention appeared when there was a huge extension of populations in the cold, wooded villages of the north. The south was poor in combustible but it was the area of the unhealthy brazier that was able to use all the heat while the fireplace disperse part of it. These are some of the examples that show the different situations between the Roman Empire and Europe where the need had completely changed. Febvre

felt extremely authorized to say that Europe was born when the Roman Empire collapsed.

3.1 Different facets of Europe

A lot of things have been called with this name through the passing of time. The name Europe is really old and the Greeks did use it to indicate a theoretical distribution of the continental masses of the sphere that constituted earth rather than a specific and well-defined country; a distribution of masses on one side and of internal water on the other and it represented a sort of equilibrium and harmony. Through this kind of view, Europe is the name of the West which is compared to the Orient or Asia. These two definitions derived from cosmography and became connected with a geographical context. But Asia became the more geographical of the two in the eyes of the Greeks and Greece had, in fact, a deeper commercial network with that continent. On the other side Europe is the place of confusion, the place where barbarian acts happen. In those areas barbarian tribes shook the little known territories without real characteristics and without boundaries; it was exactly what was Africa for the French around the 80s of the last century: a changing world full of empty places. An example of this may be seen in the old Sticher's Atlas which give us the perception of how was seen Africa, with its invented places and with the right form of the coastal areas. Those information were useful to a ship passenger or a merchant but there was almost no data on the interior apart from a few details about a bunch of negro populations, local kings, camels, dromedaries and lions. The west area was known better because the sea let people visit those territories and to build commercial stations along the coasts through which traffics with the indigenous tribes were possible. The north was the least known and there were no certain or real information available. It was a world full of kings and heads

that spoke unknown languages and that were able to aggregate some populations under one nation. No one was able to make a census nor to trace a topographic map. There were no such kings as those of the Orient nor ancient and solid empires with their bureaucracies, no pharaohs or Darius. Moreover anyone knew the natural and geographical boundaries where barbarians had their raids. Europe at the time of the appearance of this notion was a set of broad-leaved forests, snow, hoar frost, bears and carnivorous wolves, a Europe without acropolis, without marbled temples, without white cities under the blue sky: a Europe that absorbed Greece but that developed outside Greece actually. This Greek reality was increased by Macedonians and then absorbed by the Romans. After one, two, three centuries this world disappears too. After two centuries this roman world drowned under the attacks of those Negros mentioned before, of the African-European kings and of those barbarians that were marching throughout the European territories more frequently; the barbarians the broke the barriers that Rome built, or had, to oppose them; natural barriers like rivers, mountains and so forth that reinforced the fortifications of the *limes*, a sort of Maginot Line of that time with trenches, support point, *vallum*⁸¹, *castra*⁸² and *castella*⁸³.

There was a period of great confusion, uprisings in the north as much as in the Mediterranean, the part of a Libya that receives the Mediterranean name of Africa. Revolts were found in the orient and in the west too and barbarians marched everywhere establishing their home in the different places that had been parts of the Roman Empire. What would have seen a Greek philosopher like Herodotus if he was alive in the IX century? He would see three different and unequal political formations. The first, with Asian origins, was undertaken by the Arabs that brought a religion made only for them and that they want it to spread everywhere. It's a furious attack directed against the other religions but, most important, against Christianity; the religion that conquered the old

⁸¹ This term refers to a part of the system of fortifications of a Roman camp.

⁸² The amount of buildings and lands dedicated to military use.

⁸³ A defensive fortification that is commonly known as castle.

oriental countries, the old occidental countries, Italy and Greece, Spain and Gaul and that was then directed against oceanic countries. The Arabs were a sort of enemies of Christ. The other two formations are the Byzantines and the Carolingians. On one side the byzantines were guided by the king of Byzantium who proclaimed himself to be the legitimate heir of the Roman Caesars and who spoke only Greek. The emperor of Byzantium had never renounced his control over Italy and wanted to possess the rome of the Caesars as much as he had Byzantium. On the other side there are the Carolingians who were little barbarian kings coming from the shores of the Meuse that gained greater importance with time. They became so powerful that the pope, searching for protectors against the emperor of Byzantium and his patriarch, put a crown on the head of one of them, Charles, making him emperor the Christmas night of the year 800. It was a crown that Charlemagne did not want to have but that transformed him into a Roman emperor of a Roman Empire that was not Roman any longer; an empire whose head is not Rome but that is the pope who tried and achieved to remain in that city. He was a Roman emperor, whether he liked it or not, that became Charles the Great but who kept the capital up in the north, in the cold barbarian areas full of wild forests; Up there where the Rhine reigns. He was an emperor that chose one of those aquatic cities with no prestige as capital of his territories and whose only name is the collective aquatic city, *Aquae*.

The Arab empire of the caliphs, the Greek empire of the *basileus* of Byzantium, the Frankish empire of the Caesar of Aix-la-Chapelle: three great formations of which the last two consider themselves to be the heir of the Roman Empire but none of them reached its geographical proportions and, in fact, they did not even become as big as one of the two halves of the empire.

The emperor of Byzantium still preserves, as a base of his dominion, the old lands of the insular and peninsular Greece and those of the Asian Greece that were the heart of the Hellenistic period before their integration in the Roman Empire. Lucien Febvre wonders a few things about this emperor and his

relations with the empire the Romans built, if any ever existed; How can the emperor of Aix, the barbarian emperor, call the amount of his territories? Can he call it Roman? Not at all. A certain part of his dominion had never been included in that empire. Can he therefore call it Christian? At this point a certain elucidation has to be done: the *basileus* was already Christian even though he was not Catholic.

Today we have no problem to say for the first time European empire. It is not because the empire of Charlemagne was as big as our Europe, but because, for the first time, in the Carolingian formation we can distinguish some of the characteristics that we attribute to our modern Europe. The next step is to analyse these characteristics and understand in what way the empire of Charlemagne can be labelled as European. People have to note that the expression used is the empire of Charlemagne and not Europe. The extension of its empire did not cover the space of the amount of countries that we define Europeans. On the side of the Mediterranean, the Iberian peninsula is completely excluded because it is under the control of the Arabs; of the Italian peninsula, it possessed only Lombardy and Tuscany; and the rest belonged to the emperor of Byzantium and his culture. On the side of the ocean Brittany is not included in the picture: the little French Brittany and the big Roman *Britannia*. And, of course, the block of Nordic countries, formed by the mountainous Scandinavian countries, Sweden and Norway, was not included. Finally, on the side of the continent, Charlemagne brought his empire from the shores of the Rhine to those of the Elbe, or at least to the limits of the Saale, one of its tributaries. But he does not dictate the rules over the lacustrine hills that flank the Baltic nor on the area that would become the quadrilateral of Bohemia, Czech Republic, nor on the reign of the Eurasian Avars, nor on none of the Balkan countries of Hannover, Austria, Istria and Carinthia. Therefore, the reign of Charlemagne is not Europe but it is a European formation, nonetheless; the first European formation ever recorded in history.

Of all the three fronts of our discussion, there is one that can be better described: the Mediterranean front, opposed to Africa in our unconscious. For the contemporaries of Charlemagne, Africa had no real meaning but it was considered Asia, culturally speaking. It was a cultural extension of Asia given that its kings are all Asian: the Arabs. The second front is the oceanic one. For a lot of millenniums the ocean did not lead anywhere if not to the infinite until Columbus made that limitless extension limited. At the time of Charlemagne they were not in that situation and the ocean did not lead anywhere. As far as the British ocean and the Germanic ocean are concerned, that is the English Channel and the North Sea, they lead only toward the most barbarian territories that could be found: the ancient Roman *Britannia* that later became *Anglia* and *Sassonia*. Then, we do have the problem of the definition of the third front and it is important to note that we do have the same problems nowadays. How do we fix the eastern boundaries of Europe? If we walk toward the east and we pass the uncertain borders of a Germany that would never recognize some borders in this part; a Germany that is not willing to accept those boundaries as fix, natural and stable after having fought to extend its borders toward the East paying a heavy and hard cost from the IX-X century. After passing the boundaries that today belong to Germany, when will we be beyond Europe? And, when will we be in Asia? The answer might be the Ural mountains if it was not for the fact that they are an obsolete line. In fact, at the south of them there is an ample passage where one of the most important path for invading people passed. That passage has always been full of life, from East to West, as emigrants, tribes, entire nations from the Far East that brought with them enriching inventions and creations after crossing the whole density of the Asiatic world. Therefore, the limit is nothing more than a false line and it is rather a door, an entrance to the Slavic world. From a certain point of view it can be considered a cultural limit and the boundaries of Europe become the boundaries of the European civilisation. It is uncertain where this. The Hermitage Museum is a European museum as much as it is the

Academy of the sciences located in Saint Petersburg, that became Petrograd and Leningrad. When we cross the Ural mountains today we can see that this Russian civilisation of Europe becomes a Russian civilisation of Asia, a cultural and industrial population. And so the boundaries of Europe are the borders of European civilisation but the borders of this European civilisation are not fixed. Those are mobile limits that do not stop moving, moving toward the East; the same direction that German pioneers, who tried to extort lands to the Slavic populations, followed at the time of the Carolingians. They were the heralds of a European civilisation: a rudimental, underdeveloped and extremely hasty population that was European nonetheless. The problem has to be taken from a different perspective and the matter of the limits has to be left not to incur a situation with no way out.

The fact is that if we try to define what Europe means to us, the result is the following: the collaboration to a unique cultural masterpiece, the participation to a unique cultural model, the participation of very different populations. Some of them are Mediterranean, others oceanic, Nordic, oriental and all of them met different destinies. They were all changed by different historical events that had a variable weight but that contributed, with different incalculable shares, to the formation of a unique culture. They did both in case European populations earned these contributions from themselves or from their inventiveness and in case these contributions represented elements that were borrowed from populations and civilisations that surround Europe and the European world; populations that are nothing more than Asiatic cultures at the time of the Carolingians, the time of the Middle Ages. The only thing that could be seen in front of Europe was Asia and it happened even in the Africa that the Arabs extorted from the occidental world, the Roman world; the Africa that these populations occupied after invading Spain and southern Gaul. At the same time it is Asia what the Normans exported with their fast ships, it is Asia what the Eurasian Avars introduced in the centre of Europe and it is Asia for which the Ukrainians and Russians are intermediaries. It is the Asia

of the Steppe, the horses and the gifts that it gives to Europe through these passages: the modern combined driving, the saddle to ride horses, the stirrup, the horse shoeing, the wheeled heavy plough, the falconry or the hunting with birds of prey, fashion staff like the conical hat, et cetera. Not to mention compass, plants, rye, cotton paper, hops, mathematics, powder, cannon, geography, astronomy, chemistry, cosmography, pharmacology, medical science, metaphysics, poetry or the Arab sources of the Divine Comedy.

Europe built itself against Asia and experimented its power against the Asian continent. From a certain perspective it is possible to assume that Asia itself armed Europe. Therefore, Europe was built against Asia, thanks to Asia and through Asia. Europe represents both a sort of resistance against Islam and an imitation of it. And when the grand vizier Al-Mansur ransacked Santiago de Compostela with the help of Christian soldiers, it is thanks to Muslim soldiers that Robert Guiscard re-established the throne of the pope in Rome. This combination of Mediterranean and Nordic, occidental and oriental populations constituted a society with a lot of different cultural elements; Asian elements that together with other oriental elements helped the growth and fortification of this civilisation. For the first time in history, at the time of the Carolingian Empire, this combination could be found under the form of a distinct country, an effective country and a real country. And, it was the Carolingian empire that realised this combination; in this sense this empire is a European empire.

There is an important question which Febvre had an answer for: Should we say that Europe was born? The historian had never thought of anything similar and if he did he would have been disagreed with the societies we are considering, the Europeans who lived at the time of Charlemagne. They would have been totally marvelled at being defined Europeans. Among the cultural elite, the word Europe had a certain meaning with geographical features. It was a name that could be found on one of those strange, big and incredible documents that the emperor exhibited in his palace, or an abbot in his monastery. Europe was nothing more than a notion for Einhard. But, the

twelve Peers⁸⁴ would have shaken their heads if questioned about the meaning of this word. Roland, Ganelon⁸⁵ and the beautiful Aude⁸⁶ would do the same. If we moved onward for some centuries and we questioned saint Bernard what Europe was, he would have understood only if we mentioned Christianity. The word Europe appeared and there was a model of it but the reality was different: Before there was the Hellenistic period, then the Roman Empire and finally Christianity. This discourse deepened during the development of this thesis and we will try to find the answers to all the different questions that have been made in this part or, at least, it will be Febvre to explain his position in the matter with more precise details.

3.2 The relationship of Europe and Christianity analysed by Febvre

It was not Europe but a European formation the first of all the European political developments that would have come later. And, it is not even possible to mention a geographical situation because it has been already shown that the geographical notion of Europe is just a historical notion, given that nothing defines the eastern borders: not a lake, a desert, a river. Therefore the only thing that give us the possibility to define Europe is history. The word Urals had just been invented at the times of Richelieu or Luis XIII and that mountain range did not represent the political limit they are today. If we had asked Richelieu to indicate the limits of Europe he would have laughed. And Europe? It ended on a line located between Königsberg, Warsaw, Wien and Trieste and this means that it excluded not only the big extension of Russian lands but also the Hungarian level ground; an area that would be reconquered

⁸⁴ It was a group of lords that were direct vassals of the French king and that could not be judge.

⁸⁵ The person who betrayed Roland.

⁸⁶ Roland's girlfriend.

from the Turks in 1699, the last year of the XVII century. 1699 was the year of the Treaty of Karlowitz⁸⁷. Between the borders of this real Europe and the Ural mountains there were some 1200-1500 kilometres which were not part of Europe but that were barbarian principalities, half real and half fake countries. The kind of kilometres are the same that separate the old Poland and Paris. Even today Europe is not a geographical notion that remains up but it is an ideal, a dream for which men are killed; it is a cultural notion. Europe is an amount of territories that can be extended continuously and that it is extending not only toward east to what, now, is the Ural mountains but also toward the west exceeding the borders of the ocean. Nowadays, we have men that fight for a certain configuration of Europe and these people are white people who speak a European language and profess a European religion: these are European people in any single detail. They represent the extension of Europe to the west. Europe did not extend only to east and west but it did it also toward the north where the European outposts are built more and more frequently, where the air traffic is becoming a commercial necessity and where it is essential to gain a strong economical position in order to face a monetary war. At the same time the south should not be forgotten, where the big Africa is penetrated by the Europeans through the built of streets, the encirclement with its ships and the change and transfiguration of its identity. Europe, a non geographical but historical, political and cultural formation, had all its constitutive elements together in the IX century in what was called the Carolingian Empire; an empire named Roman where people officially spoke Latin and that had the Christian religion; it was made of different elements: Mediterranean and Nordic elements, ancient Roman subjects who remained there, territories that Rome never subjugated to its will and ancient barbarians who entered, alone or in groups, what once was the Roman Empire. Union, sum and fusion; on one side barbarian populations were becoming Roman and

⁸⁷ This treaty was signed on the 26 January 1699 as the final act of the Austro-Ottoman War (1683-1697).

Christian while, on the other side, the ancient Romans were becoming more like barbarians and the result of this mixture of different elements was a unique society, a civilisation that needs to be called European. But, if we could have asked that society how it defined itself the answer would not have been Europe but rather Christianity. Febvre wanted to demonstrate to us that the notions of Christianity and Europe, though not being coinciding, appear sympathetic to a historian. It is evident this non coincidence just mentioned; This point is clarified by the Arabs and the Turks as much as the pagans that in Lithuania, Estonia and Finland, would be conquered from Christ between the XII and the XIV century. But the solidarity is evident too, given that Christianity was a reality that ensued to the other reality represented by the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was a united formation. In a very strong sense, It was a state that possessed all the characteristics of a state: a fixed and delimited territory, some central institutions, some local institutions, an army, an economic power and last but not least, a common basket of ideas helpful to drive this political machine. Christianity was a unified formation which meant that it had, under its group, men whose common characteristic was the obedience to Rome⁸⁸. It possessed a united faith, a united ideal and a common language but it was not a state even though it had parts of some states. It extended its power over states that needed continuous control and surveillance. It had the role of a super-state which meant that its role was placed above any state or, better said, any institution of the state whether they were political or Christian. The catholic institutions just mentioned were the bishoprics and the archbishoprics but we could also find the monastic colonies which constituted some orders and that all followed the example of the abbey of Cluny. It was ruled by some important abbots that would later become powerful statesmen inside Christianity. Cluny represented a sort of monarchy inside the pontifical monarchy and was the second capital for the Christian

⁸⁸ The Christians of the Middle Ages, those who participated at the Crusades, were brothers to the Christians of the Orient.

world. But, Cluny was not the only example: a lot of orders had relations and material and spiritual cohesions among them and, in particular, we can mention the relations that the monasteries of Ireland, Naples and Galicia had with the one located between the Oder and the Vistula. Their messengers, or bearers of the *rotula*⁸⁹, exchanged regular news and their abbots met during some of the assemblies that were organised in various parts of the empire, Italy, France or Germany. At the same time the pope exercises a political and religious power above princes, kings and emperors thanks to the organisation of the diocese, the possession of a big richness, the availability of great weapon like excommunication. The pope was trying to build a united religious and political formation above the states but it was a dream that could not come true even though it took ages before the popes renounced to that dream. The tried for centuries to create an order that was not only spiritual but also that had political qualities. This situation led to a conflict between two different ideals, the laic spirit and the religious spirit of Christianity, that was everywhere. This conflict would be the history of the crusades. The crusades worked to the advantage of a European unification that was not only religious but that had political, economic and cultural features too. By helping the leap of maritime commerce, the crusade created new international methods. It made it necessary the anticipation of a big amount of funds thus generating an international capitalism. It worked for the solidarity that had to be called European because it was not only Roman and religious, in fact laic forces have worked with religious forces and under the protection of Christ.

The Carolingian empire was the starting point, the germ that contains it all but its genesis is still unknown. We can certainly find in it the history of the Pippinids that became Carolingians, the history of those dark dynasties that came from the shores of the Meuse river, the region around Liège which would become the fruit that will be the future emperor Charlemagne.

⁸⁹ The word derives from the Latin *rotulus* which was a kind of roll that contained a message.

Conclusion

After all the previously said there is only one way to conclude. We have seen the intense life of the king who was not only a great warrior but also a smart politician. After reading the historical part it should be clearer that he did not have any particular project when attacking the populations surrounding his dominions. He only wanted to follow his religious credo which imposed him to convert to Christianity the societies that came to form the empire; in fact, we have seen the impact that the religious reform had in the political sphere. Another important reform was the one concerning the education. It was one of the main moments in European history where there had been an attempt at giving a unified and minimal education with the possibility even for members of the peasantry to be part of it.

But the main focus should go toward the connection with the European Union. As we have seen there are a lot of elements that may confirm the main hypothesis of this thesis which was that Charlemagne is the ancestor of this community of states and people. We have analysed the juridical level as much as the economic innovation brought by the unified currency in the whole kingdom. It is irrelevant that it was his son who made this currency more complex because it was an idea that derived from the king's mind. As far as the Franco-German axis is concerned, we can only agree to the history of highs and lows it has seen and how still central it is in the conduct of new European policies. The entire world but Europe in particular is facing a difficult situation cause by the so called crisis of 2008. This crisis has had the power to deteriorate the relationships and the balance of power inside the union. But, it has almost brought the union to a crack with some countries that seem to be unwilling to pursue the path of hysterical debt repayments and of costs cutting strongly wanted by Germany.

Is there any other need to keep Charlemagne the father of Europe given the situation? The figure of the emperor can be central because of his historical importance and his political capabilities. In a moment of political, social and historical disjunction his figure can help us find a common base for European countries, a sort of unifying element. If the members of the European union remember that they are the sons of Charlemagne it might be possible to recreate a political and social harmony inside the community and find new ways to solve the economic situation. The union could find the end of the tunnel and be strengthened and united. Charlemagne may be the key the a whole new concept of union: a futuristic community where people could feel part of a unique entity instead of feeling a rejection of the others. The European Union has a lot to do to find this interculturality but we know that the key is here, the key is Charlemagne *Rex Pater Europæ*.

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