

Charlemagne

The most famous and influential king of the Middle Ages was Charlemagne, or Charles the Great. No other ruler of that time conquered, united, and civilized as much of the world as Charlemagne did.

Charlemagne's father was Pepin, ruler of Gaul (today, this area includes France, the Netherlands, and Belgium). Pepin ruled the Germanic tribe called the Franks. After he died in 768 and Charlemagne's brother died in 772, Charlemagne became the sole ruler of the Franks.



Charlemagne stood over six feet tall, had blond hair, a mustache, and a long nose. He enjoyed hunting and swimming. His mother taught him a love of learning, and his palace school attracted the best teachers, clergy, and students in Europe.

Charlemagne did not have an easy job after he became king. He began his reign fighting—and winning—a war against the Lombards in northern Italy. He also married the Lombard king's daughter to become king of the Lombards.

After thirty years of war with the Saxons, a pagan tribe in northern Germany, Charlemagne won the war and forced the Saxons to accept Christianity, which united Europe under one religion. Charlemagne also defeated the Avars, Slavs, and Bavarians. On Christmas Day in 800, the Pope crowned Charlemagne the Emperor of the Romans.

Charlemagne improved life in Europe by setting up and enforcing the feudal system, sending judges to hear local cases, using advanced farming methods, and encouraging education and the arts. Charlemagne died in 814.

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